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THE OLIVE LEAF.



THE OLIVE LEAF.

BY

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"THE SABBATH OF THE FIELDS," ETC., ETC.

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THE OLIVE LEAF.

THE OLIVE LEAF.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLIVE LEAF.

"And lo ! in her mouth an olive leaf pluckt off."—GENESIS viii. 11.

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OWING to the wickedness of man, God brought back the earth to its primeval condition, when it was without form and void. The changes of the climates and zones, the order of the seasons, the varieties of the landscape, were all obliterated by the dreary uniformity of the flood. When the flood subsided, the original work of creation was, therefore, representatively, enacted over again in the growth of plants upon the new soil, in the descent of the animals from the ark, in the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds, and in the establishment of the great world covenant, that seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, should never cease. At the first creation, the Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters, like a dove with expanded wings, preparing the world to be the abode

of vegetable, animal, and human life. At the second creation, the dove's wings hovered over the waters of the deluge, announcing the termination of the divine judgment, and the preparation of a new green world, that should emerge purified from its baptism and be to Noah what Eden had been to Adam. At the new creation of God, the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, appeared over the waters of our Lord's baptism, as a symbol of the better covenant which, under the Prince of Peace, should restore the order and harmony of the world, and terminate the evil and confusion which sin had made in human hearts and lives.

i. Let us look at the profound, far-reaching significance of the green leaf in the mouth of the dove, as the first production of a new and regenerated world. In the first place, the green leaf is the great purifier of nature. This is one of the most important offices which it was created to fulfil. In the early ages of the earth, long before man came upon the scene, the atmosphere was foul with carbonic acid gases, so poisonous that a few inspirations of them would be sufficient to destroy life. These formed a dense covering which kept in the steaming warmth of the earth, and nourished a rank and luxuriant vegetation. Gigantic ferns, tree-mosses, and reeds grew with extraordinary rapidity and absorbed these noxious gases into their own structures, consolidating them into leaves, stems, and branches, which in the course of long ages grew and decayed, and by subtle chemical processes and mechanical arrangements were

changed into coal-beds under the earth. In this wonderful way two great results were accomplished at the same time and by the same means ; the atmosphere was purified and made fit for the breathing of man, and animals useful to man, and vast stores of fuel were prepared to enable future generations to subdue the earth and spread over it the blessings of civilization. And what the green leaves of the early geological forests did for the primeval atmosphere of the world, the green leaves of our woods and fields are continually doing for our atmosphere still. They absorb the foul air caused by the processes of decay and combustion going on over the earth, and by the breathing of men and animals, and convert this noxious element into the useful and beautiful products of the vegetable kingdom. They preserve the air in a condition fit for human breathing. Without them, carbonic acid gas would soon accumulate to such an extent that animal life would be impossible. There would be no gaily-coloured blossoms to delight our senses and stimulate the poetical side of our nature ; for flowers are as pure breathers as man himself, and cannot exist in a foul atmosphere. We little think when we inhale the fresh air that its purity and healthfulness come to us by the beautiful mission of the green leaf. Nor have we only the green leaves of our own fields and woods to thank for this blessing ; the air that we breathe has been purified for us, thousands of miles away, by the palms of the south and the pines of the north, by the birches of America, and the gum-trees of Australia. Nothing is more wonderful in nature than the balance which is

constantly kept up between the animals that contaminate the air and the plants that purify it ; the refuse of the one kingdom being the food of the other. Were even so small a proportion as ten per cent. of carbonic acid gas allowed to accumulate in the atmosphere, it would destroy every living animal that breathed it. And yet out of a much smaller proportion of this noxious substance in the atmosphere, the green leaf builds up all the immense and varied mass of the vegetation that covers the surface of the earth ; while by the very same act it restores to man and the other animals the atmosphere in healthy purity.

These considerations will show us how significant it was, that the first object of the new world that was about to emerge from the flood should be a green leaf. It was a symbol, a token to Noah that the world would be purified from the pollution of those unnatural sins which had brought death and destruction upon it, and would once more be fitted to be the home of a peculiar people zealous of good works. What the green leaf is in nature, the leaves of the tree of life are in the spiritual sphere. The gospel of Jesus Christ which the Heavenly Dove carries to the homes and the hearts of men, is the great purifier of the world. The moral atmosphere is being constantly contaminated by the noxious exhalations of human sins and follies. Blessings are abused, and in their abuse turn into evils. It was necessary therefore that some counteraction should be provided. And He who has so wonderfully balanced the natural world by the ministry of the green leaf has also balanced,

in a more wonderful way still, the moral world by the ministry of Him upon whom the dove descended at His baptism, and who bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and in so doing brought in an everlasting righteousness. And not only does His salvation balance the evil of the world, convert baneful and noxious things to good and noble uses, change sinners into saints, and cause all things to work together for good to them that love God ; it does far more than produce a moral equilibrium. It is a victorious principle, and is destined in the end to overcome all the evils of the world, and to make of this sin-ruined creation a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

2. In the second place, the green leaf is the source of all the life of the world. It is by its agency alone that inert inorganic matter is changed into organic matter, which furnishes the starting-point of all life. Nowhere else on the face of the earth does this most important process take place. Everything else consumes and destroys. The green leaf alone conserves and creates. It is the mediator between the world of death and the world of life. The crust of the earth was once like a burnt cinder ; and the reason why it has not continued so, why, unlike the moon which revolves round the earth a great lifeless desert of solid lava, it has been peopled with all kinds of living things, is owing to the ministry of the green leaf. It is because of this ministry that in a world once burnt up is found an abundant supply of combustible materials for all our wants. During the long geological periods the silent

agency of the leaf has been slowly recovering combustible materials from the wrecks of the first conflagration that should enter anew into the great vortex of life and use and beauty. The quiet sunbeams, working by means of the most delicate of all structures, the cellular tissue of the green leaf, and by a process the most subtle and wonderful in the whole range of chemistry, have partly undone the work of the fire ; and whatever now exists on the earth unburnt—wood, coal, animal and vegetable tissue, the wondrous body of man himself—we owe to that simple agent, the green leaf. There is a mighty conflagration still going on continually all over the earth, not with the roar and fury of a great fire consuming an extensive building, in which the elements rush into combination with an appalling force which no human power can resist ; but unseen, unheard, unknown to us, except when in the end we see the dreary results, reducing all things to decay, corruption, dust and ashes, burning everything that can be burnt, and converting the earth into a uniform lifeless desert. But there is a mightier force ceaselessly at work undoing all the destruction, giving beauty for ashes, and the rich variety of life for the dreary uniformity of death ; working not amid the convulsions of nature and the crash of the elements, but quietly, unseen, unknown, except when in the end we see the results of its beneficent labours ; and that force is the green leaf. Methinks the little leaf is the most wonderful thing in nature. I am not surprised that God should have chosen it in the burning bush as

the medium of His revelation to Moses, or in the Cross of Calvary as the instrument of the salvation of the world. I never see a green leaf without ever-increasing wonder and admiration; amazed at the apparent inefficiency of the means and the stupendous magnitude of the result.

In this light how suitable it was that an olive leaf freshly plucked should have been the first object brought to Noah in the ark! For just as the green leaf is the means in the natural world of counteracting all the destructive forces that are reducing its objects to dust and ashes, and clothing its surface with vegetable and animal life, so the olive leaf in the mouth of the dove spoke to Noah of the undoing of the work of destruction caused by the flood, and of the raising up of a new and fairer creation out of the universal wreck. That olive leaf was the earnest of a mighty redemption, of the restitution of all things. It foretold the destruction of the death which had already destroyed the world, and the opening up of a new world beyond the wide drear wilderness and the floods of time, in which Eden itself would be forgotten in the transporting joy of heaven, and the tree of life would be restored in a grander multiplied form. And just as all this beautiful world of life and joy is the product of the work of the green leaf, so all that mankind has achieved and enjoyed since the flood—the great results of civilization, and the still greater results of redemption—arose out of the work of grace whose dawning the green leaf intimated, and whose operation it typified. For sin and grace are in constant

antagonism—like the force of the fire that burns everything to ashes, and the force of the green leaf that builds up life and beauty out of the ashes; and God has suffered sin to continue because He knows that grace can conquer it, strip its spoils, and convert its ruins into higher and nobler forms of life.

3. In the third place, the green leaf is the best conductor of electricity—that most powerful and destructive of all the forces of the earth. To guard our homes and public buildings from its destructive action we erect our lightning-rods whose sharp points quietly drain the clouds, or, failing to do this, receive the discharge and bear it harmlessly to the earth. But ages before Franklin pointed the first lightning-rod to the storm, God has surrounded the dwellings of man with a protection far more effectual than this; for since the creation of organic life every pointed leaf and blade of grass have been silently disarming the clouds of their destructive weapon. A twig covered with leaves, sharpened by nature's exquisite workmanship, is said to be three times as effectual as the metallic points of the best constructed rod. And when we reflect how many thousands of these vegetable points every large tree directs to the sky, and consider what must be the efficacy of a single forest with its innumerable leaves, or of a single meadow with its countless blades of grass, we see how abundant the protection from the storm is, and with what care Providence has guarded us from the destructive force. And was not that green leaf which came to Noah in the ark God's lightning conductor?

Did it not bear down harmlessly the destructive power of heaven? Did it not assure Noah that the wrath of God was appeased, that the storm was over, and that peace and safety could once more be enjoyed upon the earth? And is not He to whose salvation that leaf pointed—who is Himself the “Branch”—God’s lightning conductor to us? He bore the full force of the Father’s wrath due to sin; He endured the penalty which we deserved, and having smitten the shepherd, the sheep for whom He laid down His life are scathless and unharmed. He is now our refuge from the storm; and under His shadow we are safe from all evil.

4. In the fourth place, the green leaf is the source of all the streams and rivers in the world. It is by the agency of the leaf that water circulates as the life-blood of the globe. In a leafless world there would be no rains and no streams. Destroy the woods, and you destroy the balance of nature; you prevent the formation of clouds, you dry up the rivers, and you produce an arid desert. Whereas, on the other hand, foster the growth of leaves, and they will alter the nature of the climate, and change the wilderness into a fruitful field. And how appropriately in this light did the green leaf come to Noah as the earnest and the instrument of the re-arrangement of a world which had been reduced to a desert by the punishment of man’s sin! That leaf assured him that the old rivers would flow again; that the former fields would smile anew; that the forests would, as in previous times, cover the earth with their shadow; and that all the conditions of seed-time and

harvest, and of a pleasant and useful home for man, would be present as of yore. And is not the Heavenly Dove bringing to us in the ark of our salvation a leaf of the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, as a token that beyond the destructive floods of earth, beyond the final conflagration in which all things shall be burned up, the river of life will flow again ; and amid the green fields of the paradise restored, the Lamb shall lead us to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes ? The chaos of this weary and disordered earth will be re-arranged and moulded into fairer forms and brighter hues, as a fit home for renewed and glorified humanity, by Him who will do what Noah failed to do ; comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.

5. In the fifth place, the green leaf is the type upon which the forms of all life are moulded. All the parts of a plant are but modifications of the leaf. The stem is a leaf rolled up tight; the blossom is a leaf transfigured for a higher purpose ; the fruit is a leaf changed into a receptacle for the seed ; and the seed itself is a leaf packed together in a case to protect it from unfavourable weather, and furnished with a sufficient amount of food for its unfolding and growth into a new plant in more favourable circumstances. Take a pea or a bean, and if you strip off its envelope or skin, you find that it consists of a short joint and a pair of leaves ; as it grows in the ground, another joint with its pair of leaves is formed ; as it still grows in the

air and sunshine, another joint with its pair of leaves is formed ; and then another joint with its pair of leaves is formed, and so on. The whole stem consists of a mere repetition of these single elements—joints and leaves. And as all the vegetable kingdom is thus built up of leaves, so the animal kingdom is constructed on the same model. All organisms, whether animal or vegetable, are similar in their elementary structure and form ; and the most complicated results are attained by the simplest conceivable means, and that without the slightest violation of the original plan of nature. The palm of the human hand and the backbone of the human form are both constructed upon the model of the leaf. Thoreau has said that the whole earth is but a gigantic leaf, in which the rivers and streams resemble the veins, and the mountains and plains the green parts. And did not He who sent the dove with the olive leaf to Noah, thereby assure him that out of that leaf would be evolved the whole fair world of vegetable and animal life, which for a while had perished beneath the waters of the flood ; that it would be reconstructed upon the old type and developed according to the old pattern ? And did not He who developed this great world of life out of the single leaf, develop all the great scheme of grace, all the wondrous history of redemption, out of the first simple promise to our first parents after their fall ? Amid all the varying dispensations of His providence, He has been without variableness or shadow of turning, unfolding more and more the germinating fulness of the same

glorious plan of grace. The kingdom of heaven, which was first small as a grain of mustard seed, has become a great tree filling the earth with its shadow, and satisfying mankind with its fruit ; and from first to last it is but the evolution of one great idea. And He has assured us that the things of the new heavens and the new earth will be the things of the old, only purified, and ennobled, and removed for ever beyond all risk of change and death.

Of all the green leaves of the earth it was most fitting that the olive leaf should have been selected as the first product of the new restored world. The olive tree spreads over a large area of the earth ; it combines in itself the flora of the hills and the plains. It clothes with shade and beauty arid slopes where no other vegetation would grow. It extracts by a vegetable miracle nourishment and fatness from the driest air and the barest rock ; on it may be seen at the same time opening and full-blown blossoms, and green and perfectly ripe fruit. Each bough is laden with a wealth of promise and fulfilment ; beauty for the eye and bounty for the palate. No tree displays such a rich profusion and succession of flowers and fruits. It is the very picture of prosperity and abundance. Its very gleanings are more plentiful than the whole harvest of other trees. It strikingly illustrates, therefore, the overflowing goodness of the Lord to whom belong the earth and the fulness thereof. While the twisted and distorted passion of its trunk and branches, like a vegetable Laocoön writhing in agony, strikingly

pictures the labour and the groaning, and travailing together in pain of the earth, through which all its fair births and bright promises of abundance are produced, it has also been universally regarded as an emblem of peace; and when the dove was divinely guided to come with it in its bill to Noah when the waters were subsiding, God wished it to be understood as a token of peace and goodwill on earth.

What the olive leaf began in Noah's case, was consummated under the olive trees of Gethsemane. He who destroyed the antediluvian sinners by the flood, endured the contradiction of greater and more aggravated sinners against Himself. He who sent the flood as a punishment of sin, now suffered it Himself in a more terrible form as an atonement for sin. The olive leaf of Noah's dove showed that God's strange work was done, and that He had returned to the essential element of His nature, and love shone forth again. The olive leaves of Gethsemane that thrilled with the fear of the great agony that took place beneath them, tell us that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. What sweeter message, what dearer hope could come to us in our sins and sorrows than this!

We read in classic authors that men used to study the flight of birds across the sky, and draw good or bad omens from the manner of their flight; hence one of our English words, *auspicious*, means literally, beholding the favourable flight of a bird. And another

word, *temple*, meant originally a portion of the sky marked out by the rod of the diviners or augurs, in which the flight of birds was to be particularly observed. All this superstition is, perhaps, only a relic or survival of Noah's sending out the raven and the dove for indications of the state of the flood. Let us practise a higher divination. God has brought us into His temple and bade us consider the Heavenly Dove that has come on the auspicious errand of our salvation. Let us take Him in, and may the olive leaf of the gospel which He brings heal all the wounds and evils which sin has inflicted upon us, and impart to us the hope which maketh not ashamed of the inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

CHAPTER II.

THE ONENESS OF THE TABERNACLE.

“And it shall be one tabernacle.”—EXODUS xxvi. 6.

BEING a work, the tabernacle must, like every other work, have been designed as well as executed. Scripture presents to us this twofold view of it; shows it to us in plan and in progress. We are taken up with Moses to the Mount, and there we see unfolded before us the pattern as it existed in the Divine mind. This architectural plan is a grand whole. Notwithstanding the many separate parts of which it is composed, it exhibits the most complete structural harmony—the most perfect mutual consistency. It is to be *one* tabernacle—not in the sense of singleness and uniqueness, as if God had forbidden more than one tabernacle to be constructed for His service—but in the sense of a real and profound unity. By the golden taches or clasps binding together the curtains which covered it, the whole structure was made one tent or tabernacle, and all its parts and objects were united. Unity is the hall-mark which God stamps

upon all His works. It is His autograph written in the stars of heaven and in the flowers of the field, attesting that they all proceed from the same Mind. The universe is a great kaleidoscope which He is perpetually turning round, in which a few simple elements are exhibited in endless diversity ; in which the variety is not more wonderful than the unity.

1. In unfolding this sublime lesson, let us look, in the first place, at the illustration of it which the tabernacle itself afforded. This remarkable structure was one in regard to its parts. It was divided into two rooms, the holy place and the most holy, by a veil that hung between them. Only one man was permitted to enter the inner apartment—viz., the high priest ; and he only once a year, on the great day of atonement. The outer sanctuary was daily frequented by the priests, who, there, barefooted and clothed in their linen garments, accomplished their ordinary ministrations. But although thus separated, the two divisions were essentially one. The same boards of shittim wood enclosed them ; they rested on the same silver sockets ; the same curtains covered them, united by the golden taches ; the same pillar of cloud rested over them ; the same glory filled them. The ark in the holy of holies was the focus to which all the parts, objects and services, of the whole structure converged ; the culminating point to which they led up. The cherubim which stood above the mercy-seat were embroidered on either side of the dividing veil, so that those who were in the outer sanctuary could form some idea of

the mystery in the inner shrine. And the oneness of the tabernacle, which these mutual relations and the clasped curtains of the same common roof betokened, was in due time clearly proclaimed by the rending of the separating veil from the top to the bottom at the death of Christ, which threw the two apartments into one, and gave the worshipper in the holy place entrance into the immediate presence of God.

This truth of the oneness of the tabernacle was also taught by the intimate mutual relations that existed between all its objects and services. The first object we behold on entering the court of the tabernacle is the altar of burnt-offering. It stands at the threshold, indicating that only by an avenue of death can God be approached; that without shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins, no acceptable worship in His sight. Around this altar all the services of the tabernacle group themselves; and from it they derive all their significance and efficacy; a fact strikingly indicated by its very size, which is such that all the other vessels of the sanctuary can be included within it. Between this altar and the door of the tabernacle we see the laver filled with water, at which the priests who minister in the holy place have to wash their hands and feet before going in. The altar of burnt-offering makes atonement for the guilt of their sins, the laver purifies them from the defilement of their sins; so that while the one legally opens up the way of approach to God, the other morally qualifies for communion with Him. The door of the tabernacle

may now be entered, and the first object which we behold in the holy place is the altar of incense, which is the counterpart of the altar of burnt-offering without in the court. Both are intimately and inseparably linked together. It is an altar, and therefore has a reference to a sacrifice already presented ; and the holy fire which causes the sweet incense to ascend is that which had first consumed the victim on the altar of burnt-offering. The perpetual incense rising within the holy place thus forms an appropriate accompaniment to the burnt-offering perpetually presented in the court. One fire slowly consumes them both ; and any fire employed to raise the cloud of incense in the sanctuary, except that which had been taken from the altar of burnt-offering, is *strange* fire, rendering the incense produced by it unhallowed, and exposing the profane worshipper to the penalty of death. Even the incense itself, it may be added, indicates the oneness of the service ; for it is composed of various spices of *like* weight, so skilfully mingled together that no one ingredient shall predominate over the other, but each shall harmoniously combine to make one exquisitely fragrant perfume before the Lord.

The next object within the holy place is the seven-branched golden candlestick. With its seven stems proceeding from one, and its rich floral ornamentation, the most elaborate of all the holy vessels, it was beaten from one solid mass of gold by the hand of the artist, who must have had the pattern and the symmetry of the whole and of every part in his mind as he slowly and

carefully worked it out. The light shed by it, though proceeding from seven different lamps, is but one light ; the lamps being never said to send forth their lights, but only their light. The oil supplied to each is the same kind of oil, beaten, not squeezed, from the olive berries, that it may be more clear and pure. The candlestick is connected with the altar of incense by means of its tongs and snuff-dishes. These bring the fire by which the lamps are lighted, and trim and raise the wicks that they may burn more brightly. The fire of the altar becomes the light of the candlestick ; and this connection between the two sacred vessels shows the intimate relation between holiness and light, and teaches that only the pure can see God—only those who are transfigured into the Divine likeness can shine as lights in the world. The next object we see is the table of shewbread, which is placed opposite the candlestick, in order that its light may shine upon it ; and it is connected with the altar of incense by means of the precious frankincense, which is put upon each row of the bread, “that it may be for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the Lord ;” and also by the golden spoons which are employed to carry away this frankincense. When, therefore, the high priest puts incense on the golden altar, he has to go to the table of shewbread to fetch the spoonful from thence. In this act he links these two vessels—the table and the altar—together ; the sustenance of the soul with its purification. Passing into the inner shrine, we find that the sole object there is the ark, with its golden lid

of the mercy-seat, of the same dimensions with itself, so as exactly to cover it ; both forming together one vessel of the sanctuary. Out of its two ends were beaten the cherubim, originally placed at the east end of the Garden of Eden to keep the way of the tree of life, one at each end, with their outstretched wings meeting and over-shadowing the mercy-seat ; associated, not with the flaming sword of vengeance, but with the symbol of the Divine grace. We have, therefore, to regard it always as a whole. It is the one vessel, as I have said, with reference to which all the ministrations and ritual of the tabernacle service are conducted. Over it the God to whom all the worship is paid, and from whose presence alone it derives its sanction and blessing, dwells in the Shechinah cloud, and manifests His glory. Before it the holy perfume of the incense altar yields its perpetual fragrance ; and on it the blood of the sin-offering of atonement is annually sprinkled. Thus we find, if we study carefully the description given of the different vessels of the tabernacle, that there was a clear and distinct intention on the part of God to link them together into one great harmony of meaning and service. Each vessel has its own distinct use, and each can be viewed apart from the others ; and yet in every act of priestly service, all are joined together, and are in active operation at the same time. It needs the combination of the whole to make a complete and perfect act of worship, just as it needs the harmonious action of all the members of the body to constitute the act of living. And just as the golden taches link the curtains of the taber-

nacle together, and make of them one covering for one structure, so the smaller golden vessels attached to the golden candlestick, the altar of incense, and the shewbread table—the tongs, snuff-dishes, spoons, and censer—link together the different vessels of the sanctuary into one ministration, forming in this way one golden chain of service simultaneously carried on in the presence of God in behalf of Israel.

2. The words of the Lord to Moses have a wider reference than to the immediate object which called them forth. They may be applied to nature. It may be said that the tabernacle pointed back to the creation. It was a symbol of the great world of nature, as at once manifesting and concealing God. It was, indeed, as a Rosetta stone, to explain to man the spiritual hieroglyphics in the typology of nature, which had become dark and insignificant to him when he sinned and fell, that God devised the clearer typology of the tabernacle, and set the cherubim, which were the symbols of creation in connection with the redemption of man, above the mercy-seat in its holiest place, and embroidered them on the veil that divided the outer from the inner sanctuary. There was no typical object or service in the tabernacle which might not have been seen in nature if man had not lost the key of interpretation. The very rainbow, which was the illuminated initial letter of God's covenant of grace, painted on the first cloud after the deluge, might have been recognized in the varied colours of the veil, and of the wrappings that covered the sacred places when not in

use. The world was only a larger tabernacle, with the same symbols, only darker and more mysterious ; proving that they emanated from the same Being. Many of the most thoughtful minds among the covenant people were impressed with this wonderful unity. They saw in the darkness of night the pavilion of God ; they spoke of His having made a tabernacle for the sun, spread out His heavens as a curtain, and laid the beams of His chambers in the mighty waters. In God's creation the wise and good are guarded by the cherubim, and dwell in the secret place of the Most High, under the feathers of His wings. The psalms and hymns of Israel bear constant reference to this beautiful resemblance. And, as a crowning proof that this was no mere accident, discovered only by a poetical mind, but an intention of the Almighty, we find that the work of creation is described in precisely the same way as the construction of the tabernacle. We see the work of creation in plan and in progress, in design and execution. The first chapter of Genesis gives us the antecedent plan—the pattern shown on the Mount, as it were—of the making of the heavens and the earth, and of every plant of the field, *before it was in the earth*, and of every herb of the field *before it grew* ; and in the narrative that follows we have the actual execution and unfolding of this antecedent plan of creation by the common operations of nature, by continuous physical action.

If the creation be thus a greater tabernacle, in which all the objects are meant to show forth the praise of God, and to symbolize His work of grace, we should

expect to find in it the same unity, the same oneness of design and harmony of all parts, that we see in the Jewish tabernacle ; and this is what we actually find. This is the great lesson which modern science has taught us so effectually. It has brought forward innumerable striking illustrations to impress it more deeply upon our minds. It is finding out more and more in this marvellous structure of the visible creation that all the joints are well fitted, that the adaptations are mutual and universal. Instead of looking at things separately, it views them as parts of one great, articulate, concatenated whole, and members one of another. Indeed, science may be defined, in the words of a French philosopher, as “the incessant effort of the human spirit after rest,”—a rest which can only be attained by the reduction of all things to a unity.

The forces of nature are mutually convertible. The forms of nature have mutual likenesses. The whole mineral kingdom is seen in the structure of a grain of sand ; the whole vegetable kingdom in the form of a single leaf ; the whole animal world in the construction of a single rib. Flowers are transfigured sunbeams ; and colour, heat, and sound are but modes of molecular motion. That which we find in the whole we find over again in every part. The climates, zones, seasons, and products of the whole earth we find epitomized on a single tropical snow mountain ; and the whole earth is like two great mountains, set base to base at the equator, with their tops at either end covered with the arctic and antarctic snows. The climates and seasons, with their

vegetable and animal productions, were distributed in geological time, as we find them distributed in geographical space. Each element has counterparts of every other element. The sea repeats the mountains and valleys of the earth in its waves, the rivers in its currents, and the trees and flowers in its ocean gardens. Animals resemble plants ; plants possess analogies with animals. The globule of blood and the rolling planet are one. Buffon said that there was but one animal ; and Faraday expressed his conviction that in the end there will be found but one element with two polarities. Owing to the imperfection and limitation of our powers, we are obliged to deal with fragments of the universe, and to exaggerate their differences. But the more profound and varied our study of the objects of nature, the more remarkable do we find their resemblances. And we cannot occupy ourselves with the smallest province of science without speedily becoming sensible of its intercommunication with all other provinces. The snowflake leads us to the sun. The study of a lichen or moss becomes a key that opens up the great temple of organic life. If we could understand, as Tennyson profoundly says, what a little flower growing in the crevice of a wayside wall is, root and all, and all in all, we should know what God and man are. And the same unbroken gradation or continuity which we trace throughout all the parts and objects of our own world, pervades and embraces the whole physical universe—so far, at least, as our knowledge of it at present extends. By the wonderful discoveries of spectrum analysis, we find the

same substances in sun, moon, and stars which compose our own earth. The imagination of the poet is conversant with the whole, and sees truth in universal relations. He attains by insight the goal to which all other knowledge is finding its way step by step. And the Christian poet and philosopher, whose eye has been opened, not partially, by the clay of nature's materials worked upon by human thought so that he sees men as trees walking, but fully and perfectly, by washing in the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, whose pure heart sees God in everything, and in God's light sees light—he stands at the shining point where all things converge to one. Wherever he turns his inquiring gaze, he finds "shade unperceived so softening into shade, and all so forming one harmonious whole," that not a link is wanting in the chain which unites and reproduces all, from atom to mountain, from microscopic moss to banyan tree, from monad up to man. And if the unity of the tabernacle proved it to be the work of one designing Mind, surely the unity of this greater tabernacle, this vast cosmos, with its myriads of parts and complications, proves it to be no strange jumbling of chance, no incoherent freak of fortuity, but the work of one intelligent Mind having one glorious object in view.

"The whole round world is every way
Bound with gold chains about the feet of God."

3. But not only did the tabernacle repeat in miniature the whole creation as God's dwelling-place, it also more especially typified the new creation—the Church of

God. In fact, this is the aspect in which it is commonly regarded. The Epistle to the Hebrews is the key which interprets the relation of the Levitical institutions and rites to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and explains their fulfilment in the Christian economy. And so looking at the Church of God, we find that the same characteristic of oneness belongs to it too. Under all the varying dispensations of His grace, God's Church has been one. The Jews were in the outer court because the way into the holiest was not yet made manifest. Gentiles, by the new and living way opened up through the rent veil of Christ's flesh, have entered into the inner shrine. But Jews and Gentiles alike are now united in one communion and fellowship in Christ. The Saviour the Jews looked forward to in rites and sacrifices, we look back to in the ordinances of the Gospel. The religion that was veiled to them has been unveiled to us. They saw the types and shadows ; we behold the living and glorious realities. Over all is the tabernacling of the same God ; and the Church of Jews and Gentiles is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into an holy temple in the Lord."

In this way, those who were far off as well as those who were nigh have been made members of the one household of faith. And still, notwithstanding the many diversities of circumstance, creed, and experience ; notwithstanding the multiplication of sects and denom-

inations, each marked out by well-defined lines of doctrine and discipline, each clearly and sharply distinguished from its neighbour, there is in reality but “one body, one Spirit, and one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in all.” Amid accidental diversities there is substantial unity—unity in all that is truly essential beneath. These diversities, arising from different temperaments, habits, and culture, are necessary to the development of the truth, and of the freedom and power of the spiritual life. Each bears witness to some essential part of the Divine counsel; each holds forth prominently some truth which has been suffered by others to fall into the background; each is indebted to the other for “supplemental influences which make its faith and life grander and wider than it could have shaped out for itself unaided.”

The same process by which physical life advances, through diversity of organs and functions to a higher unity, and society is developed from its rudimentary condition, takes place in the Church. The lowest organism possesses in a single cell all the organs necessary for the preservation and perpetuation of life; but as life advances in the animal or vegetable scale the organism divides itself into many cells, some being specially set apart for nutrition, and others for reproduction; and the wonderful unity of the human body, which is at the top of the scale, is secured by the complex and harmonious operations of numerous parts and

organs that have each a particular purpose to serve. So with society. In its primitive condition each man performs for himself all the arts of life. But in proportion as society advances, in the same proportion does specialization of social functions advance, until in the perfectly organized society each man has his own business to carry on, and his own contribution to make to the well-being of the whole. So, too, in the Church, specialization of function, differentiation, is the law of development. Each Church knows in part, and prophesies in part ; turns the ray of heavenly light into its own characteristic hue. And it needs that all the Churches should be gathered together by that charity which is the bond of perfectness, supreme love to God, and fervent love to one another, in order that the one perfect Church of Christ should be formed. It needs that all the hues should be combined to make the one pure white beam of truth. Not in their separate state, but "with all saints," can the different Churches go on to comprehend what is the length and breadth and height and depth of the love that passeth knowledge, and to be filled with all the fulness of God. While Christ has many folds in which He is educating His people in different circumstances, by variations of character and culture, He has only one flock who are led in the same way to the everlasting fold. The Saviour's intercessory prayer that all the dispersed of Israel may be gathered into one, that all the disciples of every name may be one, as God and Christ are one, is being fulfilled more and more in proportion as men of all Christian creeds

and communions are ready to draw and act together, and to regard the differences that divide them, not as hindrances to loving intercourse, but as helps to the widening of each other's spiritual vision, and to the rendering of a fuller manifestation of the mind of God to the world. Bringing all the tithes of what they have gained by their separate training and discipline into one common storehouse, they will prove the Lord therewith until He pour down a blessing so great that there will not be room to receive it; and through this unity and community the world will believe at length that Christ came forth from God.

But the Church on earth is only part of God's great Church. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the outer division of the tabernacle as the type of the Church on earth, and of the inner part of the sanctuary as a type of heaven, where the true High Priest is now pleading with His own blood for us. Between the Church below and the Church above, the veil of death seems to intervene; and there seems to be no connection between those who worship in the earthly sanctuary, and those who serve God day and night in His heavenly temple. But this veil has been rent in twain by the death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord; and the two divisions of God's house have been thrown into one. The powers of the world to come have entered into and transfigured the vain show of this passing and perishing world. The life which we live on earth is part of the life which the angels and spirits of just men made perfect live before the throne. Our

citizenship is even now in heaven ; we are come even here to Mount Zion, the city of the living God. Of one Lord the whole family, the *one* family, in heaven and earth is named. Living and dead believers make but one communion, constitute the body of Christ, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. We are under the narrow, sensible horizon of time ; they are under the great rational horizon of eternity, which comprehends ours as the great sky comprehends the tent that is erected beneath it. We have here on earth, in the beauties of nature, and in the joys of life, types and shadows of brighter substances and more satisfying joys in heaven. We have golden taches and foretastes and antepasts of the things unseen and eternal, connecting this life with the next. The glories of the inmost shrine are embroidered upon the veil that falls between us and the full realization. In our more immediate approaches to the God who fills both worlds with His presence, we stand on the same ground with the redeemed in glory ; we feel that this is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. If we worship God in spirit and in truth, the substance of that worship, whether in the body or out of the body, is the same. In purely spiritual exercises the wall of partition is thrown down, and heaven and earth are one. And while we believe and continue in the communion of saints, and partake of the same celestial food, we are not altogether parted from them. Between the spirits of just men made perfect and believers remaining on the earth there is a unity far more intimate than we commonly suppose.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in remarkable words, whose full meaning we are not able to gauge, says, "that they without us should not be made perfect." They are indeed made perfect in holiness and in Divine rest, but there is a perfection still before them. They form a great cloud of witnesses, watching with keen and unflagging interest the fortunes of the Church on earth; and just as that which is behind in the sufferings of Christ will not be filled up until He Himself has wiped away all tears from the eyes of His people, so the perfection of the saints will not be complete till the whole Church has entered into everlasting bliss.

4. The tabernacle was the Bible of the Israelites. God taught them by its object-lessons in their childhood and pupilage in the wilderness. But that age of shadows and symbols has disappeared; man has passed from the childhood's stage of education into the higher school. We have been trained for a clearer perception and a fuller possession of the truth. God has given to us His own written Word, in which His thoughts are woven with man's thoughts, making of the whole Book the speech to the world of Immanuel, God with us. Its record extends over a period of more than four thousand years. It was written by men belonging to different ages and civilizations, possessed of the most varied temperaments and tastes, and living in widely different ranks and circumstances. It contains almost all the forms of human composition, is characterized by the utmost variety of subject and treatment, and is adapted to all kinds of experiences.

But amid this extraordinary diversity, the most conspicuous as well as the grandest feature of the Book is its unity. There are a thousand golden taches linking together all the parts of the fabric ; and, from Genesis to Revelation, we have the gradual unfolding of only one scheme of grace, the slow manifestation of the same kingdom of heaven. The great thoughts which the latest books contain had their roots at the very gate of the Garden of Eden, in the earliest book. The promise of the seed of the woman given at the beginning develops more and more of its germinant fulness as the ages and generations pass on, until at last it flowers and fruits in the life and death of Christ, in the formation of the Christian Church, and in the organization of a perfected Christian society. The Gospel is cast into the mould of the law ; the New Testament is the complement and explanation of the Old ; and in the book of Revelation the circle of sacred doctrine and history is rounded and completed, the latest developments of grace coalescing with the earliest dealings of God with man, and the paradise lost is restored. It is this wonderful unity that constitutes the grandest evidence of its inspiration. Like the artists employed in the manufacture of the Gobelins tapestry, who work behind the upright loom and do not see the pattern which they are producing, the sacred writers themselves could not have had before their minds the complete plan of the Divine operation which they were partially working out. They inquired diligently, indeed, what

the Spirit which was working within them did signify; but while they felt that there was more in their words than they could master, they could not grasp with their understanding the relations of their own share of the work to the whole. Behind the particular scope and purpose of each book, we discern the great plan which rules the whole revelation, the great pattern to which God works, the inspiration of the one Mind that is uttering its thoughts through manifold forms and independent organs.

The construction of the Book is like that of a perfect plant, whose growth is according to unity of plan, and whose parts are modifications of one fundamental typical form, so that they may be compared with one another and with the whole. We find stamped upon it the same impress of unity which we see in all God's works. He who throughout all the realms of nature acts upon the great principle of unity of type with variety of development, modifying by successive steps the first embodiment of the vertebrate idea, as it appeared in the lowest and oldest fishes, until at length it became arrayed in the glorious garb of the human form, has acted upon the same principle in the different dispensations of His grace, which were but successive disclosures, clearer and fuller as time went on, of the same primitive dispensation. Throughout all God's gracious dealings with man, we can trace a wonderful sameness and continuity, akin to that which science reveals to us in the constitution and arrangements of the earth and of the stars. And

what an overwhelming idea does this thought give us of the unchangeableness, the all-comprehensive intelligence, and foreknowledge of God! The wonderful manifoldness of Scripture, the infinitely varied experiences of which it is the utterance and to which it addresses itself, are but the unfolding of the kingdom of redeemed humanity from its root in the promise made to our first parents in Eden; just as the infinite diversity of nature is but the manifestation of the original conception contained in the first strokes of the Great Artist's pencil—in the first creative fiat, "Let there be light." And between the revelation of nature and the revelation of the Bible there is a continuity of relationship which proves that the one is the complement and fulfilment of the other, and that they are both the work of one Mind. For He who commanded the light at first to shine out of darkness, and so wrought out all the forces and forms of creation, hath shined into our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and so hath wrought out all the forces and forms of the new creation.

5. Man's body is a tabernacle—the greatest of all temples. It is fearfully and wonderfully made, the very highest possible form of organization, the masterpiece of creation. It, too, is *one* in the fullest sense of the word, being indeed the most complete and vital unity in the material universe. It is the finished result of all the strivings and tentative efforts which make up the history of the creature, and contains in its

structure clear traces of all the stages through which it has passed, and by which it has been perfected, linking its vesture with that which clothed in succession of development the inferior animals from the lowest forms. The rudimentary organs that are useless in the lower animals in which they occur acquire use and significance in man's body; while the structures that exist as dwarfed survivals in him are eminently useful in the lower creatures in which they are found. In both cases they are the golden taches linking them together into one grand tabernacle. Man's body sums up in itself all the forms, forces, and substances of the world—furnishes the key to the whole order of nature, being a microcosm, or "in little all the sphere." It builds out of the common dust of the ground a shrine on whose altar the fire of conscious life is ever burning, and the sacrifice of one part of its substance for the maintenance of the rest is being constantly offered; through which pass communications alike from the lower and the higher spheres—matter being stamped with its lofty impress and linked with the world of mind and spirit.

But that which gives the body its wonderful unity, which builds up its parts, and compacts them into one grand vital whole, and makes of it a temple, is the human soul that pervades and possesses it. Body and soul constitute together man's personality. Neither is complete without the other. We are apt to separate between them, and to cast the things of the body into an unkindly and unnatural shade, while we

unduly exalt all that refers to the soul. But the Gospel in its wholeness includes them both, and insists upon our being complete not only in our spiritual but also in our bodily nature ; for each element of our complex being has its own distinct use and function, and the true human completeness is the sanctification of body, soul, and spirit. By the unity of body and spirit we have always a sense of our own personal identity, and realize the intellectual and moral continuity of our lives. And our Christian belief in the resurrection of the body is but the logical consequence—the last and highest expression of our intense belief in the indestructible unity of man ; for we believe that this unity would be mutilated, if at death the body, which is as necessary as the soul to constitute man's personality, were to perish altogether. Reason and revelation alike assure us that man's unity, in its unimpaired completeness, will be preserved through all the changes of life and death, and when this mortal shall have put on immortality.

Man is the high-priest of God, in whom the world is conscious of its own harmony, and who is to exhibit that harmony in its highest form in the order of his life, and in this way to show forth consciously and willingly the praise of God which the inferior creation is showing forth without either consciousness or will. For his sake the wonderful unity of the universe, the unity of the tabernacle, the unity of the Church, the unity of the Bible exists. They have been thus constructed and ordained that by the teaching and training they afford he might grow up into an holy and harmonious habita-

tion of God through the Spirit. But through the exercise of his unique gift of liberty, sin has introduced disorder into his person and life. He broke away from the law of his being, from the gravitation of God, and lost the cohesion of his nature, which henceforth became disintegrated and corrupt. The flesh now lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. There is a law in the members warring against the law of the mind. We have broken up our life into little fragments ; we contrast secular and sacred, assigning this part to the world and that to God—living exclusively for heaven or exclusively for earth ; wholly carnal or wholly spiritual. There is a ceaseless struggle within us, and a ceaseless strife without us. We are the centre of a whirlpool of contending and discordant forces which we ourselves have set in motion. Our wheels and those of nature are out of gear, and therefore continually clash. We are homeless and restless in a world where all other creatures are at home and at rest. All the scenes and objects of creation witness that we only are changed, that we only have introduced disorder into God's works. Of this strife the noblest spirits are the most conscious.

But God has not left man to be thus the only discord in the music of His works. He has sent His own Son to tabernacle in our world and in our nature, and so establish the balance between all the parts of our being, and restore the lost harmony between man and nature. By His atoning death our Lord made an end of that sin which caused the discord and confusion. By His

perfect life He consecrated alike all the parts and offices of life. And by taking up with Him into heaven at His ascension the results of His thirty years of obscure physical labour, as well as the three years of His spiritual ministry, and transfiguring them both, He has abolished the distinction between secular and sacred, and restored a real unity to human existence. Order, beauty, harmony, life, joy, are all brought back by Him. What a wonderful grandeur of meaning do the revelations of science in regard to the chain of life, from the lowest monad up to man, give to the old words which we usually read with so little apprehension of their significance: “A body hast thou *prepared* for me!” Looking back from the incarnation through the long dim vista of the world’s development, we see how God was slowly and gradually preparing a tabernacle in which creation and the Creator should meet, not in semblance but in reality. “In Him all things *consist* ;” or, as the idea contained in the Greek word thus translated might be conveyed, He is the key-stone that binds together and rounds to perfection the glorious arch of the universe. “For it hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell,” the fulness of the creature and the fulness of the Godhead; “and having made peace through the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven.”

CHAPTER III.

THE HOSPITALITIES OF NATURE.

“As for the stork, the fir-trees are her house.”—PSALM civ. 17.

VERY remarkable was the feeling with which the ancient poets of Israel regarded the cedars of Lebanon; a feeling which has survived in the worship which the Maronite priests celebrate annually under their shade during the Feast of the Transfiguration. For long ages these venerable trees clothed the slopes and valleys of the great Syrian range; and with their roots planted in old glacial moraines, they bore witness regarding the amazing luxuriance and abundance of the pines of the far-off Miocene world, and still carried out their important uses in the economy of nature. The Psalmist, whose keen eye even for the humblest objects is strikingly seen in the great hymn of nature set to the music of the spheres—the 104th Psalm—was struck with the wide hospitality which they afforded. The grove of belated cedars—the last survivors of a most hospitable old race in its retired nook on the north-western slope of Lebanon—attracted the mi-

gratory birds ; and in the quiet retreat, in the fragrant shade, protected from the wild storms that raged over the snowy plateaus outside, they built their nests and reared their young in safety. There could not be a greater contrast than between the wind-swept desolation around and the oasis of life created in the midst of it by these magnificent trees. Outside is the stillness of death ; within, nature is never silent. All day the shrill sound of the grasshopper is heard, and the grove resounds with the short, clear notes of little birds. Ezekiel gathers all animal life around these cedars, for there, he says, "All the fowls of heaven made their nests in his boughs, and under his branches did all the beasts of the field bring forth their young." The Psalmist also shows the fitness of the fir-trees of the lower heights of Lebanon for the nests of the stork, these being better adapted for their habitation than the roofs of the houses, which they frequent in Europe ; for in the East such situations are too frequently made use of in domestic economy to suit the quiet and retiring habits of the bird. And he goes on to notice the beautiful adaptation that exists between the timid marmot or coney and the clefts of the inaccessible rocks to which it flees in danger ; and between the chamois or wild goat of Syria and the snow-clad haunts over which it freely ranges, secure from the pursuit of man or beast of prey.

The relation between birds and particular trees is especially interesting. It would seem, indeed, as if some trees grew dense, and matted together their

branches, that they might thus afford a secure asylum for little birds. This would appear to be the final cause of the lime tree—to give a single example—which, instead of spreading out its boughs and branches widely like other trees, crowds them together, and so fills up the vacant spaces with slender little twigs that the whole centre of the tree forms an impervious labyrinth of brushwood, within which the little bird is safe from the pursuit of its foes.

Some objects are repellent and exclusive. They give no shelter or support to any created thing. They suffice for themselves, and stand out clearly defined in their distinct and independent existence. The surface of the snow is barren ; the chilly glacier has no communion with the mountain glen through which it passes. The clear, sharp-cut crystal harbours no stain from earth or sky to show its sympathy with the materials out of which it sprang. The marble rock, like the snow, does not invite the green things of the soil around to share its existence with it, and give to and take from it an element of picturesqueness and beauty.

And yet, as in human society, when social laws overbear private plans, and the social design is fulfilled in spite of selfish opposition, so in nature the substances that seek to exclude others are made to contribute to the general harmony and the beautiful balancing of creation. The very snow is made to be friendly and hospitable, for it nourishes on its stainless bosom a simple, one-celled plant which grows with such rapidity and in such marvellous profusion that it gives to whole

fields of polar and alpine snow a deep crimson hue, as if a creature's blood had dyed them. In the shallow parts of water melted on the surface of the glacier by the hot noon-day sun may be seen jelly-like masses of vegetation ; while under the stones which the rocks around hurl down upon it, as if in anger at its hostility, may be found lively colonies of the small black glacier flea. Nature will not allow this cold, frigid substance to maintain a separate existence ; for besides boulders from the rocks, she persists in soiling its surface with dirt-bands and masses of débris from the crumbling mountain-side, so that a line of demarcation between ice and earth cannot be drawn, and the glacier blends with the rest of the mountain ; while the sky claims kindred with the deep cerulean blue that shines in the crevasses. Marble, too, takes on the warm, golden tint of the sunset, and is stained by time with a russet hue that brings it into partnership with the common rocks, with which all things make friends—the mosses, lichens, vines, and birds. Even the hardest crystals and precious stones have occasional cavities filled with fluids, which indicate their origin. Nay, so anxious is nature to assimilate every object, that on the thatch of man's lowly cottages she plants her tufted mosses ; on the slates of his statelier roofs she paints her frescoes of golden lichens ; and even on his windows she produces not only the iridescence of age, but also a growth of curious, minute algæ. On his dark unsightly cinder-walks, which seem like spots of ink disfiguring nature's fair page, she makes her dandelions to open their sun-

shine; and on the raw new walls which he builds around his possessions, to separate them from nature's wastes, she spreads her hoary nebulæ of vegetation. Man's works are thus made kindred to the earth and the elements: and nature, by her hospitalities, makes them at home in every situation.

Some objects are more hospitable than others. The beech, of all trees, is perhaps the most self-contained. It fills out its trunk so thoroughly; its bark is so hard and stuffed and rounded with its wood, that it has not a rift nor a crevice in which any living thing might find refuge. No moss forms a green tuft upon it; no leafy or shrubby lichen finds a foot-hold on its smooth bark. And even the crustaceous species that consist of a mere film of grey matter grow thinner on its hard repellent surface than on the rock itself. They cling so closely that they cannot be separated. No botanist would go to the beech expecting to find on its trunk the wealth of lowly plants in which he delights. To the entomologist it is equally uninteresting, the number of insects that frequent it being exceedingly few. Nor is it chosen usually by birds to build their nests on its boughs. Darwin mentions that worms hardly ever make their curious castings under its shade. The ground beneath it nourishes no green grasses, and only its brown mast and polished three-cornered nuts carpet the soil.

Why is the beech so inhospitable? Why does it thus stand alone, apart from the rest of creation, and proudly maintain its own self-sufficient existence? It

is indeed one of the grandest of our forest trees. Nothing can be lovelier than its translucent foliage in spring, making, as Coleridge says, "the level sunshine glimmer with green light." Nothing can be more splendid than its blaze of amber tints lighting up the whole woodland in autumn like a pillar of fire. Its shade is ample ; its leaves are sweet and tender ; its nuts pleasant and nutritious. And yet all creatures, with the exception of the pig, which feeds upon its nuts, seem to shun it ; and hardly any moss or lichen ornaments its trunk and arms with its quaint jewellery. It stands in the natural world of pictures around us as a type of a thoroughly selfish and unsocial nature. Only the lover seeks it to carve upon its smooth, hard bark the name of the beloved one, fondly hoping that it may long retain, clear and sharp as if cut in stone, the cherished inscription. But even this tender secret it refuses to keep ; its trunk swells, and the letters become dilated and distorted, and in a few years a new growth smooths out and obliterates the name, without leaving a trace on its callous wood. Perhaps this smoothness and hardness of the bark and wood, as well as the dryness of its shade—for no other woods are so free from damp and so pleasant to walk in as beech woods—may be the reason why it shelters so little dependent life. Even the rain-drops refuse to linger about it, and though the sunbeams may play through the green meshes of its transparent foliage and tremble on the lines of silky hairs that project from the margins of its young leaves "like eyelashes from the

margin of the eyelid," yet without moisture the light can favour no growth of fern or moss or lichen, which loves a damp atmosphere; and without these lowly plants no insect or bird-life can flourish.

Another inhospitable tree is the pine. Its degree of selfishness varies with the species, some being much more tolerant of alien life than others; the common larch and the cedar being, perhaps, the least exclusive, and the aurucaria the most. The trunk and branches of the larch are covered from head to foot with tufts and rosettes of hoary lichens, which cling specially to this tree and give it a most venerable appearance; but the aurucaria surrounds itself with an impenetrable armour of spears and daggers, within whose formidable circle no living thing dare intrude. I once saw a squirrel skipping along a lawn and, suddenly stopping at the foot of a tall, wide-spreading aurucaria, it looked up at the bristling trunk and branches with evident astonishment, as if it had never seen anything of the kind before; and with an expression of disappointment and fear that was almost human, and certainly was exceedingly comical, it turned away and climbed up a more propitious-looking species of pine near at hand. But whatever may be the case in regard to individual trees, the pine-tribe in its social character is decidedly inhospitable. A pine wood is one of the loneliest scenes in nature, not merely as regards the intrusion of man, but as regards the intrusion of any other living thing. Nothing breaks up its uniformity and monotony. It has none of the rich variety of life that characterizes

other woods. The seasons themselves make no impression upon it, for it is dressed in perennial green, and it retains its shade alike in summer's heat and winter's desolation. It prevents all undergrowth; no brambles dare to stretch their long, trailing, thorny arms—like the feelers of some creature of prey—with in its guarded enclosure. No wild roses can open their trembling petals white with fear or crimson with blushes, in its solemn sanctuary. No hazel-bush will drop there its ringlets of smoking catkins in spring, or its ruddy clusters of nuts in autumn. No mimic sunshine of primrose tufts, no pale star-beams of anemone or sorrel will light up its gloom. No glimpses of blue sky are let into it by hyacinths, or blue-bells, or violets. To all the lowly plants that find refuge in other woods, and in turn adorn and beautify their hosts, the pine trees in their dignified independence refuse admission. No song of bird or hum of insect is heard beneath their boughs. And on the ground below, strewn deep with a carpet of brown needles and emptied cones that have silently dropped in the course of long years from overhead, and are slow to decay, only a few yellow toad-stools and one or two splendid scarlet mushrooms make up for the painful dearth of vegetation. It seems as if the balsamic breath of the pines, which is so wholesome to human life—preventing all fevers and infectious diseases—were as deadly as the upas shade to other forms of life.

How widely different is it with the oak! This of all trees—of all living things—is the most hospitable; and

in this respect it is well chosen as the badge of England, which has the proud distinction of affording a refuge to every political outcast and victim of ecclesiastical tyranny throughout the world, and fosters by its love of freedom and constitutional government every type and variety of human life. A whole book might easily be written upon the multitude of living things that obtain food and shelter from the oak. The natural history of its inmates and boarders is like that of a garden or, indeed, a county. Some creatures are peculiar to it, and find their home nowhere else; and to many more that are free to come and go, it extends a kindly welcome. Were it to perish altogether from off the face of the earth, many insects and plants would disappear utterly. The insect population alone of the oak tree, including beetles, butterflies, and a great variety of tiny creeping things which none but a naturalist cares for, or is aware of, would furnish materials for study of a most interesting and absorbing kind for many summer weeks together. When we do not see themselves, we see the evidence of the existence and working of the insects in the great variety of curious galls which they produce upon the trunk and branches: oak-apples that hang on the twigs like some mysterious unknown fruit, and are as wondrously fashioned, although excrescences and abortions of the vital sap, as the legitimate acorn cups and eggs themselves; and beautiful golden-brown spangles that crowd all the under-surface of the withering leaves in autumn like the seeds, or the "fairy's money" as it is called,

on the back of the ferns, thus linking the oak-leaf and the fern-leaf—the highest and the lowest type of vegetation—together in the wondrous unity of nature by a strange similitude of appearance.

But it is among the plants that we find the most beautiful occupants of the oak-tree. The ivy climbs up its trunk, which affords admirable support for its myriads of little feet, and changes its glossy leaves, as it creeps higher and higher, from the deeply-cut angular pattern to the oval and pointed one; and at the top it waves its airy sprays among the oak-leaves, and produces beside the acorns at the extremities of the branches, the light green flowers that blossom only when the plant has nothing to cling to, and must shift for itself; as if nature were taking care that when the life of the individual was in danger, the life of the race should at least be made sure. Then there is the mystic mistletoe, with all its dim and sacred associations with the Druid worship of our remote ancestors. It clings still closer to the oak, for it is not an epiphyte like the ivy—merely making use of the tree for support, and finding its own food independently from the soil and air—but a partial parasite that strikes its root into the substance of the oak, and while to some extent feeding upon its prepared juices, is capable of showing a little independent spirit and working for its own support, as is evident from the fact of its having green leaves, which, however pale, can still decompose, to some extent, the sunshine into materials of growth. The mistletoe is thus a partial boarder of the oak; it gets, so to speak,

its principal meal from it, while for its lighter refreshment it is dependent upon its own resources. A beautiful emblem truly it is, thus growing on our royal English tree. According to the suggestive mythology of our ancestors, which had, indeed, much in it of the deeply philosophical, as well as of the practical and religious, the oak was Hesus, the god best and greatest, strongest and everduring; and the mistletoe was man, weak and poor, but living in him and clinging to his everlasting arms.

It would be difficult to enumerate the various kinds of mosses, lichens, and ferns that show a preference for the oak, and share its grand and liberal hospitality. Its trunk seems as if made to harbour those lowly Liliputian members of the vegetable kingdom whose quaint forms and curious properties harmonize so well with the fairy scenery of midsummer night dreams. Unlike the smooth bark of the beech, made to keep all visitors aloof, the bark of the oak is full of furrows, crevices, irregularities, porches and out-buildings as it were, where wandering seeds find lodgment, and first tender growths can secure their hold against scorching sunbeam and cruel wind. The huge patriarch, hoary with years, whose life-time bridges across the whole history of England, allows the tiny imps of vegetation that are but of yesterday—the perpetual infants, so to speak, of plant-life—freely to clamber over its roots and arms, and hang upon its rugged bosses which time has used so cruelly, reducing them almost to bone and muscle, their emerald bracelets of moss, their plumes of

polypody ferns, and their rosettes of lichen, adorning the magnificent old grandfather of the woods with the ornaments of youth and beauty! What a wonderful picturesqueness do these lowly forms of life, crowding around the oak as it grows in years and in size, give to it! They richly repay the hospitality they receive in the added charm which they impart to the forest patriarch. They show an exquisite sympathy even with its weaknesses, hiding its defects by their fairy sprays, and covering its dead members with a lovely pall of vegetable velvet. It teaches us thus the touching lesson that the grandest things in nature may be made more beautiful and picturesque by the simplest; as the greatest man may be indebted for his chief happiness to the smiles and the prattle of the little children that climb on his knee. Even to the fairy shapes that played among these mystic forms of plant-life, when the world was younger and more credulous, the oak was more hospitable than any other tree. The Dryads took their name from it, and flitted in and out among the flickering shadows cast by its leaves upon the ground, and gave to those whose eyes were purged with the eye-salve of faith to see them, glimpses of a realm fairer and brighter than the common human world of care and toil. And how open to all the flowers and shrubs of the wildwood are its wide-spreading arms! The grass may grow up to the very foot of its trunk unreproved by any dark frowning shadow cast by its leaves. The hyacinth may make a fragrant mist of blue about its roots, and the primrose need not blanch its sunny

cheek as it creeps up to its venerable bole; and all the seasons may bring their varied gifts to bloom and fade within its circle without let or hindrance. Royal as it is, there is no solitude or exclusiveness of royalty about it. Rather does its dignity consist in its hospitality; and its nobility is indicated by its freeness of access and kindly and generous welcome to all that may hold within it the sacred principle of life. The gates of its hospitality, like the Bokharian nobleman's, are "nailed open." Sturdy and independent as it is, there is thus no object that is more closely linked with the general life of nature, that blends more harmoniously with the operations which different creatures carry on for their own advantage, and makes of them one genial system of mutual benefit.

Nature, in all her departments, is a system of mutual accommodation. Every object affords hospitality to every other object. I except, indeed, the whole class of parasites, whose existence is not only peculiarly objectionable, but exceedingly mysterious, and which seem to militate so much against the argument of design and the goodness of creation. For it cannot be said that they are hospitably received and entertained by their hosts. The connection between them is a compulsory one, and is inevitably disastrous to the entertainer. These parasites take all and give nothing in return; they benefit no single created thing. And their existence seems to have no other purpose than to point out the moral, how loathsome and terribly degraded living creatures become that have ceased to support them-

selves and prey upon others; how parasitism inevitably reduces form and function—alike in the mental and spiritual as in the physical world—to the lowest and basest point. No creature can abdicate its glorious individuality and independence with impunity. Nature stamps upon it her hall-mark of degradation.

But there is another principle besides parasitism throughout nature, viz., *commensalism*. The term was applied, in the first instance, to a class of humble animals living in the sea that are taken under the protection of a higher class, feed at the same table, and associate together in the various pursuits of life, but have otherwise no connection with each other. The commensals partake of the same food with their hosts, but they do not feed upon them, do not make use of the pabulum that has been organized for them by passing through the system of their associates. There is a large number of these curious creatures, whose habits are exceedingly interesting and instructive. But the term that describes them might be extended so as to include plants as well as animals, on land as well as in the sea, which exhibit similar peculiarities. Ferns, lichens, and mosses are not parasites, for they do not injure the trees upon which they grow. They feed upon the same air and sunshine, and imbibe the same moisture, but they procure their own living independently of the structures which give them support and protection. So, too, with the ivy, for though it attaches itself to the bark of a tree by thousands of rootlets, it does not derive its susten-

ance from the tree, but from the air and soil by means of its genuine roots and green leaves ; and if its stem be severed it will die like any other plant. The ivy is, therefore, a commensal, and not a parasite. Perhaps the most beautiful and striking examples of commensalism are the large class of plants called epiphytes, which simply rest upon the trunks and branches of trees, and adorn them with wreaths and garlands such as they themselves could not develop, beautifying the aged structure with new bursts of bud and blossom, and casting even over death a vesture of loveliness which makes the end brighter than the beginning. Orchids are the most familiar representatives of this class. In dense tropical forests they live upon the decaying matter that accumulates on the boughs and in the forks of old trees ; or they send out long aerial roots that enter into and feed upon no soil, but extract nourishment solely from the moisture and carbonic acid gas of the atmosphere. They have huge gouty joints which contain a store of organized nourishment, from which the materials of the exquisitely-fashioned blossoms are drawn forth ; and the insect-like shapes and colours of these blossoms, and the articulations of their stems, as well as their aerial habitats, point them out as the counterparts in the vegetable kingdom of the insects in the animal.

In tropical countries this system of mutual accommodation exists to a large extent. It is created by the exigencies of the situation. The luxuriance of tropical vegetation developed by the hot sun and

steaming vapours forbids the strong assertion of individual life. Each must give way to a certain extent to its neighbour that is seeking a share of the same benefits, and pushing forward to the full blaze of sunlight. Hence many plants become of necessity epiphytal or commensal ; and plants that are elsewhere sturdy and independent trees become there dependent and climbing. In such climates, where the struggle of life with life is keenest, nature must be hospitable if she is to accommodate the vast variety of species which she calls into existence. Each individual must help another ; and the higher must lift up the lower to something like its own level of advantage. In temperate climates, where the struggle is more with the elements than with living things, nature must take in from the cold and the storm many lowly and tender forms that would perish outright if left alone and undefended. The trees must do this timely service to the flowers and ferns that grow beneath their shade, and to the still lowlier plants that find a lodgment upon their trunks and branches. On the wild, inhospitable moor the hardy heather affords protection to thousands of humble forms of life, which without its shelter would not have been able to exist. Even in the quiet valleys, many species require the shade of the woods and forests ; and when these are cut down and they are exposed to the full effect of the sunshine and the wind they perish outright. The same species, too, extend hospitality to each other. In temperate climates the most striking characteristic of plants is this

gregarious or social tendency. They crowd together into tufts and colonies and clumps, for the sake of mutual warmth and shelter ; and strive, by combination, to ward off evils and achieve results which they could not do individually. The heather, by reason of its social habit, is enabled to live on the wild, desolate moorland ; and the pine on the mountain-crest maintains itself by the sympathy of its congregated fellows. Even the moss, which in mild and agreeable circumstances—in the deep shade of the wood or on the sheltered bank of the stream—becomes individual, in exposed situations forms large tufts and cushions, and spreads itself over a wide, continuous area.

A spring or stream of water is the most hospitable of all things. It is the heart of nature, from which circulates the vital fluid that nourishes all the verdure and life around. Without it there could be no exercise of hospitality anywhere ; and all living things only pay to each other the debt which they first of all owe to the spring or stream. The complex civilization of man himself originates in it ; and finding it, he finds in it the fountain head of much that he is seeking in this world.

But it is impossible to follow to the end this curious chapter in the natural history of our world. We find that, in the vast majority of cases, nature is open on every side like a tree to the visits of all her living forms. She is continually on hospitable thoughts intent, and has so thoroughly imbued her offspring with her own ideas that they readily fall in with her plans. She

places before us, in the kind shelter which the larger and more richly endowed objects afford to the smaller and poorer, a silent picture of what should be our own conduct in the intercourse of human life. And in the added beauty and charm which the exercise of this grace of hospitality imparts to the objects that bestow it, she teaches us that, by receiving strangers, we too may be entertaining angels unawares. In the few exceptional cases where her dumb and soulless things maintain a dignified exclusiveness, and give to all comers a haughty refusal of admission, we have, in her own hieroglyphic language which is so expressive, teaching eye and heart at the same time, a rebuke to that human selfishness which would confine to itself all the benefits which it enjoys, and refuses to carry them over into some higher usefulness. As nature is ever defeating the plans of selfishness, by making all her objects mutually dependent, none being allowed to live entirely for itself, so God, by the arrangements of His Providence, is breaking down all human monopolies, and enforcing a wide hospitality, allowing no man to live for himself alone.

In the plan of religion His intention is still more manifest. The growth of His kingdom on earth is like that of a mustard-tree, which, springing from the smallest seed, develops into the grandest form, covering the earth with its shadow, and lodging the birds of the air among its boughs, protecting the poorest and feeblest things which men may despise. And because of their want of hospitality, because they confined to themselves

the blessings of their favoured condition, and were heedless of the Divine charter by which they held their peculiar privileges, that in them and by them all the families of the earth should be blessed, God deprived His people Israel of their heritage. The barren fig-tree that had yielded no fruit to satisfy the hunger, no shade to cool and refresh the weariness of other nations, but kept for its own selfish leaves only all the blessings of heaven and earth—might be cut down as a cumberer of the ground.

From every lonely, hungry soul Jesus seeks hospitality, standing at the door without, waiting patiently for the opening of it ; and when He is welcomed in there is a mutual feeling of love, and the guest becomes a generous host. And what His thoughts of hospitality to the race whom He has come to seek and redeem are, is strikingly seen in that most beautiful parable where the feast is spread, and the servants are sent first to individuals favoured by fortune, and then to the poor and the outcast, to bid them all come, for all things are ready. However full, there is yet room in the Father's heart and in the Father's house ; and not till He has gathered all the dispersed wanderers from the four corners of the earth, and made them to sit down in the everlasting kingdom, to satisfy the mighty longings of eternity with the meat that endureth for ever, will He—the Great Giver, the type and source and end of all hospitality—see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied !

THE AVALANCHE.

THE Alpine peasant in his lonely glen,
Who sees the sudden lake formed at its head
Burst all at once its icy barrier,
And sweep his village from its perilous ledge ;
Or hears the avalanche roar down the heights,
A cataract of snow, whose very breath
The stoutest pine-tree snaps like brittle reed,
Scattering destruction in its awful path,
And burying home and field in one white grave ;
His vision bounded by his narrow hills—
His sense impressed by his own loss alone—
Imagines that these evils are the work
Of some dread Power, that loves but to destroy.
But we who live beneath more spacious skies,
And take a wider survey of the world,
See in these evils but the needful links
In a vast scheme, by which the parched earth
Is watered, and the treasures of the snow,
For ever melted and renewed, are borne,
With most beneficent economy,
Down from their storehouse on the lofty peaks,
To give prosperity and wealth to realms
That otherwise would have been barren wastes.
And so the sorrows that o'erwhelm our life,
The pains and losses that make bare our lot
And chill our hearts, which, in the narrow space
Of their own dark horizon, we are apt
To view with terror, as the wanton sport

Of some malicious fate that seeks our hurt ;
Viewed from a loftier vantage-ground of faith,
With wider outlook of experience,
Are seen to be but transient incidents
In a great plan of loving-kindness, meant
To make our whole life richer and more blest,
And spread the fruitage of a heavenly love
O'er deserts useless both to God and man.
Beyond those hills that high as mountains rise,
And hem us in, and darken all our sky,
Stretch the fair lands which these white realms make
green,—

The watered gardens, whose serener heavens
Through distant storms have gained a purer blue.
Why should a *living* man complain, whose life
Transcends the limits of all mortal woe,
And ranges far beyond, where absolute
And everlasting compensations are !

CHAPTER IV.

THE THIRST OF GOD.

"Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink."—ST. JOHN iv. 7.

ALL paths lead to a well. It is the focus of interest, the vital point, and creative centre of the landscape. It attracts all things to itself, and diffuses its blessings, as a star diffuses its light, far around. It is the place where life begins and where it is constantly renewed. It has a perpetual springtime about it. Our Lord's steps, in His toilsome journey northwards from Judæa to Galilee, along the arid rocky back-bone of Palestine, led naturally to such a well. The same cause that drew to its side the blade of green grass, the lily of the field, and the overshadowing tree, the timid coney, and the thirsty wayfarer, drew Him who shared the sympathies and experiences of His creation, and linked the wants of His own life with those of the least of His creatures. The well on whose shaded brink He sat down, in the fervid heat of the Eastern noon, to rest His weary frame, was one not more celebrated for its delicious water than for its august

associations. It was as old then, to the great Pilgrim who had wandered to it from Judæa, as it is now to the modern pilgrim who visits it from England. Ebal and Gerizim, on whose twin peaks the altars of an alien faith had smoked for ages, looked down upon it; and around it the same corn-fields which had nourished the ancient Shechemites, spread their golden aureole. The shadows of eighteen centuries rested on it ; and during all that long period, from the time when the patriarch Jacob dug and bequeathed it to his favourite son, its pulse had continued to beat, and its living waters to minister refreshment to the passing generations.

What were the meditations of our Lord in this storied spot, as He waited patiently for the return of His disciples, who had gone to buy food in the neighbouring city, we cannot tell. But the necessities of the present would overmaster the memories of the past. He was not only worn out with fatigue, He was also faint with thirst. The well of Sychar was not a spring or fountain, whose sparkling waters wimpled up to the brim, and overflowing with their own fulness, ran rejoicing over the fields, diffusing life and gladness wherever they flowed. On the contrary it was a draw-well, more than a hundred feet deep. Far down, through the filmy green meshes of the maiden-hair fern that lined like lace-work its damp, shady mouth, He could see the glimmering of the cool, sweet water ; and He longed for a draught. But He had no rope or bucket with which to draw it up ; and His thirst was intensified by the inaccessibility of the water that seemed so near. He might indeed

have supplied His want by a miracle. He who in olden times had caused the flinty rock to pour forth fresh, sparkling water at the touch of Moses' rod, might have made the well itself a cup, and caused the water, deep down beyond the reach of an unaided arm, to bubble up spontaneously and offer itself in homage to His lips. But instead of availing Himself of His supernatural power, Jesus sat down beside a well dug by human hands, and waited patiently for human help to relieve Him in the ordinary way, and by the common machinery in use. True to the purpose of His life, He submitted to the human limitations which He had imposed upon His Divine power, when He entered our flesh and so-journed in our world ; and fulfilled the high purposes of God in ways and by means accessible to all men. And just as in the wilderness He endured the pangs of hunger for forty days rather than convert stones into bread at the suggestion of Satan ; so here, at the well of Sychar, He bore the pangs of thirst and faintness rather than separate Himself from the lot of humanity which He had voluntarily assumed, and fall back upon His power as God to relieve His wants. He waited in the former case, in a place where human help was not procurable, with a sublime patience and self-abnegation, till the angels relieved His necessities ; He waited, in the case before us, till a woman came up to the well to draw water, as her custom was, for household purposes ; and to her He said, " Give me to drink."

We have in this request of Jesus a strange reversal of the relations between the Creator and the creature. He

who sat there weary and thirsty beside the well was the Author of every good and perfect gift, He whose distinctive name is the Giver. And yet we find Him a suppliant at the feet of His own creature, begging for a portion of His own gift from her. Does it not show in a striking manner how in giving Himself to save a perishing world, Jesus made Himself a complete sacrifice, emptied Himself of everything, and became poor as the very poorest?

In the thirsty East a request for water is everywhere answered with the utmost readiness and courtesy. The sense of a common need, and the inestimable value of the element that supplies it, make even the rudest peasant at once sympathetic and anxious to give relief. But religious hatred had dried up this fellow-feeling in the heart of the Samaritan ; and instead of at once offering the pitcher full of water which she had drawn up from the well to the lips of the thirsty Jew before her, she expressed her astonishment that such a request should have been made to her at all. It is possible that having thus given expression to the hostility of race and creed that separated her nation from His, she might have speedily repented of her churlishness, and granted Jesus the simple favour which He had asked. But no opportunity was given to her. Absorbed in the interest of the conversation that ensued, she forgot all about her own errand and the necessities of the mysterious Stranger before her, and laid the pitcher down beside the well that she might listen more attentively ; while Jesus Himself was so engrossed with His exposition of

Divine truth to the ignorant and sinful woman, that He completely lost all sense of thirst and weariness. Recalling to her the dark secrets of her life, He aroused her slumbering conscience. He saw within her a spiritual susceptibility, vague hopes and aspirations after higher and purer things which her loose and careless life had not wholly stifled ; and to these He appealed in the most gentle manner. He dug, by His close personal dealing, through the hard rocky strata deposited over her truer nature, and thus prepared a well in her heart, from which the living water she had idly asked from Him without any trouble to herself, should flow as the result of her own experience. And she was the first to receive that glorious revelation, to whose full unfolding all after ages have listened with the deepest joy—“I that speak unto thee am He.”

And how refreshing must this interview have been to Jesus ! He had just begun His public ministry. During several weeks He had remained in Jerusalem after the Passover preaching the Gospel of repentance. But He produced almost no impression upon the bigoted Jews. The Pharisees were irritated against Him because He had expelled the traders from the Temple, and had dared to interfere with their time-honoured customs ; and began to manifest their opposition in various trying ways. He was filled with grief and indignation when He saw the spirit of envy and jealousy that moved the holiest men, dashing fiercely the cup of life from the lips of a dying world, lest their own privileges and vested rights should be

imperilled. His heart was disconsolate when He saw how unsuccessful had been His mission. Wearied and dejected more by the cruel hardness of men's hearts than by the tropical fierceness of the sun and His own physical wants; athirst more for the saving of men's souls than for the water of any earthly well, we can imagine how the successful result of this interview must have cheered Him. Rejected by His own people, He was welcomed by this Samaritan stranger. And there was a gentleness and winningness about His whole manner to her, which shows how much she had touched His heart, how intensely personal and individual was the interest which He felt in her. We realize as we gaze and listen how near Jesus has come to us; how truly He is our brother. He had indeed drink as well as meat which the world knew not of. His spirit, revived and strengthened by heavenly influences, bore up the sinking body; and the joy of bringing back this poor lost sheep to the fold was to Him as the sweetness of water to the parched lip. She had not given Him to drink from Jacob's well, but she gave Him to drink the joy of saving and blessing her. This was the true water that He wanted when He said to her, "Give me to drink." The natural was but the type of the spiritual.

The whole incident is an acted parable of the Gospel. The words of Jesus, "Give me to drink," are an expression of the thirst of God. We are accustomed to speak about the thirst of man, and deem it an all-important thing that his thirst should be satisfied. But we hardly

ever speak of the thirst of God. We think it natural for man to say to God, "Give me to drink," but we imagine that God can have no thirst. Such a desire would seem to us an imperfection; and we cannot associate the faintest idea of want or imperfection with Him. We think of His infinite self-isolation. We picture Him in the vast loneliness of space satisfied with His own glory. The old pagan idea of the gods contained in Lucretius—

"Who haunt
The lucid interspace of world and world,
Where never creeps a cloud, or moves a wind,
Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar
Their sacred everlasting calm."

This pagan idea we transfer to the living and true God. We imagine that He cannot have anything corresponding to the experiences of humanity; that He is raised infinitely above all that we can know or feel. But the object of Revelation is to counteract this erroneous conception; to show to us that God has no self-love,—does not live for His own glory in the sense that mistaken men impute to Him. We believe that God made us in His own image, that our nature is but a reflection of His nature; that there is that in the creature which corresponds, though at an infinite distance, to something in the Creator. If this be so, then it cannot be wrong of us to say that God has wants as we have, which require to be satisfied, desires that need fulfil-

ment. What does the creation of the world indicate, but the fulfilment of God's desire for self-manifestation, for giving away that He may get back again? He created the multitude of waters upon which He sitteth, to satisfy a want in Him corresponding to the sensation of thirst in man. This is the final end of water, not merely to quench the thirst of plant and animal, and make the earth fertile and beautiful—these are secondary and mediate ends—but to minister to God's own enjoyment; for we are expressly told that for His pleasure water and all other objects of nature are and were created. Long ages before there was any rational self-conscious being who could understand and enjoy this most wonderful, and yet most familiar element, to whose wants it might minister, God called it into existence. He thirsted for water, and water appeared in the desert world; deep called unto deep, and the sea without responded to the sea in the Infinite Being. And for unknown æons He drank a divine joy from the boundless ocean and the flowing river, from the foaming cascade and the sparkling fountain. He needed all these forms of water to satisfy the mighty thirst of His nature; and He was satisfied, for He said of them all that they were very good. The beauty and the glory of the multitude of waters form a fountain of joy, of which only He who created them can drink in its fulness. It can be said of all the waters of the earth, in the highest sense, that they are rivers of God which are full of water, which He keeps ever full and flowing, that they may be sources of perpetual refreshment to Himself.

And it is a sublime thought that He quenches His thirst day after day, not only from the streams which man frequents, but also from the central sea, over whose vast solitude no ship has ever passed, and from the little spring that wells up on the lonely mountain side where human foot has never trodden. All their beauty and their glory minister to the thirst of God.

What, too, is the creation of man, but the satisfaction of a want of God? He who said of Adam, "It is not good for man to be alone ; I will make an helpmeet for him," must Himself have had the same feeling, wished not Himself to be alone, unrevealed and unloved. He desired, so to speak, to find an helpmeet for Himself, to surround Himself with intelligent and moral beings on whom He might lift the light of His countenance, who could in some measure understand His thoughts and sympathize with His ends, who could obey Him not from the necessity of their being, but from the spontaneous affection of their heart. And therefore He made man in His own image, endowed him with the marvellous gifts of reason and liberty, reflecting the spontaneity of the Divine will—not the slave, but the servant and friend of God. God's Spirit could not find rest in the creation of sun, moon, and stars, or in the creation of rocks and seas, plants and animals ; He could not rest in dead matter or in physical life ; He rested only when He had made man, another spirit like Himself with whom He could hold communion, in the mirror of whose being He could see His own image

reflected, and from the full river of whose life He could drink and be satisfied.

And when the waters of this fountain of God's joy were embittered and poisoned by sin, we can imagine in the dry and parched land of the world, what a thirst came upon His Spirit. The Psalmist speaks of thirsting for God like the hart for the water-brooks ; but this is only a faint image of the great thirst which God has for the restoration of man to holiness and happiness. There is a hard unimaginative school of Christian thought, the members of which say that God's glory would not be lessened, God's happiness would not be diminished in the least degree, if the whole human race had been destroyed ; and by such a statement they think that they are exalting our conceptions of God. But such an idea has no warrant in Scripture. It is immeasurably dishonouring to God. In the divinity of indifference no true human heart can possibly believe. Science tells us that the force of gravitation is a mutual thing ; the great sun itself bending in its turn to the smallest orb that revolves around it. And is not the highest gravitation of all a mutual thing too? If God attracts human souls, do not human souls attract Him also? Science may tell us of His infinite power and greatness ; and theology may speak to us of a God afar off ; but the Gospel tells us of His infinite love, that He who is highest above us, is most one of ourselves. And love like His cannot sit in grand and cold estrangement from His fallen and ruined creatures, cannot find rest under the loss of His human

race in the consolation that they are as nothing compared with His universe, and cannot be missed. A God of love has told us again and again, in language which cannot possibly be mistaken, that He hath need of us. We find innumerable statements in the Bible which show how God is grieved, suffers loss and pain, because of human sin and misery. He longs after His creatures' affection, and is sorrowful because they exclude Him from their hearts and their ways. He complains of their coldness and alienation. If I am a Father, where is my honour? "Oh! that my people had hearkened unto Me." His righteousness is not an abstract principle that can be satisfied equally by the conversion or by the punishment of the sinner; it is conjoined with the infinite tenderness of paternal love, and equally with His mercy yearns for the sinner's restoration. The history of man's redemption is not merely the history of his good fortune, as if he had escaped by accident from the hands of a Being capable of very different conduct; it is a manifestation of the essential character of God, which is love.

On an old Mexican temple was written the beautiful inscription, expressing an unconscious longing of the heathen world after Christ, "Blessed be Thy coming, O heart of heaven." And is not this the inscription that ought to be written above the portal of every Christian Church, whose mission it is to testify of Jesus as the revelation of the heart of heaven, ever beating for us? The love of Jesus is just the love of God made visible; the sufferings of Jesus are just the suffer-

ings of God brought in a bodily form within the limits of our senses. The appearing of Jesus as the God-Man declares the infinite love of the Father; a love that has a great want at the heart of it, that misses something infinitely dear to it, and for the sake of that something is willing to endure any toil, and to make any sacrifice. Jesus suffered on account of human sin, to show to us how the Father suffers because of our sin; how dreadful has been the burden upon Him through all the ages of the wrong and anguish with which human sin has filled the world! Jesus thirsted beside the well of Sychar to show to us that thus God thirsts for our recovery from our state of sin and misery. He who from the beginning, as the Head of His great house the universe, and as such has felt most sorely all its evils and sorrows, says to us, as Jesus said to the ignorant, sinful woman of Samaria, in the greatness and eagerness of His thirst, with pleading voice and gesture, with infinite love in every look and tone—"Give me to drink."

The physical attitude of Jesus beside the well of Sychar is the type of His spiritual attitude beside the well of salvation. What He was then He is now, for He is "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Weary, faint, as it were, after that finished work of redemption which cost Him so much—a Lamb as it had been slain, He has sat down beside the well of salvation—which His own hands have dug in the wilderness and His own grace hath filled, and He says to every unsatisfied soul, to every thirsty one that comes to the means of grace to draw water—"Give me to

drink." Though He hath now all power on earth and in heaven, still in the matter of the soul's salvation He is as weak and dependent as in the days of His flesh. He cannot draw water from the well of salvation for Himself by a miracle, any more than He could from the well of Jacob. He cannot employ supernatural means to convert the soul. He cannot compel the sinner to give Him the joy of saving him. He must wait beside the well till the soul is made willing in the day of His power. He can only use persuasive means ; He can only beseech and entreat the sinner by the story of His self-sacrifice, by the pathos of His redeeming love, by all that He has done and suffered for men. He could not save the sinners of Jerusalem by miraculous power ; and because they disregarded the day of their merciful visitation, and the things of their peace were for ever hid from their eyes, He could only weep in deepest anguish over them. He could not draw the young ruler to his side by compulsion ; and therefore, though He loved him, He had to allow him to go away grieved. Much as Jesus has done for us, only we ourselves can give Him the reward of His work. We must give Him to drink out of the very well which He Himself has opened and filled for us. We must, of our own free will, of our own spontaneous love, give Him the joy for which He craves, and for which He endured the Cross, despising the shame.

Wonderful mystery of grace, that sinful creatures can satisfy the thirst of the Infinite God ; and that this should be His method of satisfying the immortal thirst

of their own souls ! Wonderful reciprocities of love by which the Saviour sups with the sinner, and the sinner with the Saviour ; by which the sinner abides in Christ, and Christ in him. If we bring our tithe of water to Him and prove Him therewith, He will open the windows of heaven and pour down upon us an overflowing blessing. The clouds which draw their dull vapour from the thirsty earth, return it again to the parched soil, in the shape of bright summer showers that make the fields laugh with verdure and bloom. In the spiritual as in the natural sense the law holds ever good that “unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.” And God gives us back what we give to Him with a hundred-fold increase. As in the natural world He gives us a waving golden harvest, in return for the small sacrifice of seed which we entrust to His keeping in the spring ; so in the spiritual world, He gives us back a fountain of living water springing up in our hearts into eternal life, in exchange for the few drops of love with which we seek to quench His thirst.

It is told in the life of Sir John Herschel, the great astronomer, that when he was a boy he asked his father on one occasion what he thought was the oldest of all things. The father took up a small stone from the garden walk and said, “There, my child, there is the oldest of all the things that I certainly know.” But the astronomer in saying this, surely spoke without due consideration. The stone tells of something far older than itself ; for what was it that made the stone—broke

it off from its parent rock—and rounded it to its present shape? Was it not water? The substance of the stone was deposited originally as mud at the bottom of some primeval sea; and it was shaped by the action of the waves, or by the running waters of a river. Water, therefore, is older than the stone, older than the mountains and hills which have from time immemorial been taken as the emblems of what is everlasting. It is the oldest of all material things, and also that which will endure the longest. And in this respect, as in all other respects, is it not an emblem of the Gospel, which was foreordained before the foundation of the world? It is the old water of life of which Jacob drank, and of which the Apostles and all Christians since have drunk, that we come to the well of salvation from time to time to drink. And the water is all the more precious that it comes to us from eternal sources, associated with the memories of many ages and generations. The Gospel is all the more impressive that it belongs to all time, to all eternity; that it sets before the eye of the frail and perishing sons of men the eternal counsels and the absolute unchanging purposes of God. But while thus old, the Gospel is ever fresh and new, just as water is the oldest and yet the newest of all things. It has the same suitableness, the same power of adaptation to the wants and circumstances of to-day that it had to the wants and circumstances of the first Christians nearly two thousand years ago.

Thirst is the most urgent desire of our nature. It is the most painful feeling we can experience. We can-

not bear it long ; it cannot be put off. Unless soon gratified we perish in torment and misery indescribable. But the physical want—the physical longing of thirst—is but a feeble and inadequate emblem of the craving that is in the heart of Jesus to save us. He needs our salvation. He represents Himself as empty, as incomplete without it. We help to fill up the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. It was prophesied that He should see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. It was a world's redemption that He sought, and only a world's redemption can satisfy the infinite thirst of His soul. He says to each of us as He said to the woman of Samaria, "If thou knewst the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water ;" thou wouldest have been the petitioner, and not Jesus. What He wants from us is not our substance, our profession of religion, our ceremonialism. These bear no true relation to the thirst of His soul, any more than a bag of pearls would bear any relation to the thirst of our body. He desires what is co-natural with His own want. Only like can satisfy like ; only love can satisfy love. He says, "Son, daughter, give me thine heart," and if we put Him off with all that we possess, our devotions, our alms, and our good deeds, and withhold our heart, He will remain unsatisfied, and we shall remain unblessed. Among the native tribes of Japan, the thirstiest man is considered the holiest ; and is it not so in the Christian sense, for the thirstiest man shall receive the most of the water of life ? Let us then

drink deeply of the living water which Jesus gives, that thus we may give Him to drink ; refresh ourselves and refresh Him at the same time. He asks this simple favour from us ; and He will become our debtor, and will give us in return the benediction of heaven. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world—for I was thirsty and ye gave me drink."

CHAPTER V.

A TUFT OF MOSS.

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones."—

ST. MATTHEW xviii. 10.

EVERY one has heard of the touching incident in the life of Mungo Park, the celebrated African traveller, how the sight of a little tuft of green moss growing in the barren sand of the desert cheered him when he was almost reduced to despair. Like a lighted candle placed within a dim transparency, bringing out its rich hues and pattern, the sorrowful circumstances in which he was placed invested the familiar commonplace object with new beauty and significance. It seemed afame with thoughts of God's providential care, like the bush on Horeb. It became a wicket-gate through nature into heaven. Its marvellous grace, its lovely structure, its preservation in such an inhospitable waste by the constant gentle ministry of the sunshine and the dew, inspired him with such comforting thoughts of that great Being whose tender mercies are over all His works, and who is a very present help in

every crisis of human need, that he rose up with fresh energy and hope to pursue his journey. In gratitude for the good service it had done him, he brought home some specimens of the moss, which, when submitted to scientific men, was found to be identical with a species that grows abundantly on our own woodland banks, called *Fissidens bryoides*, or the Lesser Fork-Moss. It is a delicate little thing about a quarter of an inch in height. Even to the eye that looks at it carelessly it presents a beautiful appearance ; but the microscope brings out fully its hidden charms, and reveals wonders of structure before unknown. It has two sisters in this country that have the same family features, but are distinguished from it, among other peculiarities, by the different positions of the seed-vessel ; in the one case springing from the root, and in the other from the side of the stem. They all grow on moist woodland banks, or in the wet crevices of rocks ; and, owing to the brightness and transparency of their foliage, whenever they catch and imprison a stray sunbeam passing into their dwelling-place, it lights them up with a golden gleam like a cluster of topazes.

Let us take this little moss with so interesting a history as a type of its class, and proceed to examine some of its details ; and we shall be no less struck than Mungo Park was with its marvellous formation and adaptation to its circumstances. The leaves are transparent and are arranged in one plane on either side of a pale pink stem. Their structure is very curious and totally unlike that of any other moss. For about half

their length they are divided into two blades on each side of the nerve, the lower part of which embraces the stem, and the upper a portion of the leaf placed immediately above it. They are composed of minute cells closely packed together, and have a central nerve running from the base to the apex, and a distinct border round the plain edge. When dry they are crisp, but are easily revived when moistened. The habit of the moss is scattered or gregarious, forming little tufts, sending up from the summit of each individual a pink fruit-stalk, somewhat longer than the stem, crowned with a little oval urn or capsule, which stands erect when in the green unripe state, but bends down when it is brown and mature.

This curious vessel contains the spores, or seeds, in its interior, attached to a little central column which supplies nutriment to them: and the arrangements made for their safety and ripening are very remarkable. First, a veil, slightly split on one side, covers the seed-vessel like the extinguisher of a candle, the object of which is to afford protection, like the scales that cover the bud in flowering plants. It remains attached until the seed-vessel has grown strong enough to bear exposure, and then by its expansion it throws it off—an operation which is made easier by the convenient split made for the purpose in its side. When the veil is removed a conical lid is seen adhering to the mouth of the seed-vessel, which also in due season withers and disappears. The mouth of the seed-vessel thus exposed is seen to be furnished with a single row of sixteen

equidistant teeth, cloven half-way down, which stand upright and look like an elegant fringe. The purpose of these teeth, which have the power of contracting and expanding and fit into each other from opposite sides, is to close up the orifice in damp or rainy weather, so as to keep the precious contents dry and warm till the sun again shines, when they speedily open and resume their original upright position. One can see this wonderful mechanism in operation at any time, by simply breathing upon the fringe of teeth or applying a little moisture to them, when they fall down and form a wheel-like lid of many spokes, completely closing the mouth of the seed-vessel ; expanding immediately when exposed to the sunshine, or as soon as the moisture is dried up, and standing round in an upright position like watchful sentinels ready to do their duty. In addition to this precaution, at an earlier stage of growth, the little central column in the interior of the seed-vessel, around which the seeds are clustered, is endowed with the same sensitiveness to the condition of the weather ; in a dry state of the air stretching and turning itself in a spiral manner so as to raise the lid, which at this period covers the seed-vessel, thus letting in the air and warmth, but collapsing immediately should the air become damp, so as to close the orifice securely and protect the seeds from injury.

1. The most curious thing about the teeth of mosses is that they are either four in number, or constitute some multiple of four. In every moss the number of teeth is invariably one or other of the following series :

—four, sixteen, thirty-two. No seed-vessel is ever found with an intermediate number. In the vast majority of species the number of teeth is thirty-two. This is also the number of teeth which the most perfect animals possess. In man the first set contains twenty, and to these in the permanent set twelve are added, making thirty-two in all. Other parts of animals are remarkable for the constancy of these numbers when the development is complete; the body of man and of the flocks and herds associated with him having ten fingers and ten toes, which being added to the three parts of both arms and of both legs, make in all thirty-two parts. This train of thought might be extended to a great length and applied throughout the vegetable and animal kingdoms. Two or four and its multiples is the prevailing number in the lowest orders of plants, according to which all the parts of ferns, mosses, lichens, seaweed, and fungi are arranged. Three, or multiples of three, is the typical number of monocotyledonous or endogenous plants, without branches and with parallel veins, to which the grass, the lily, and the palm belong. Five with its multiples is the model number of the highest class of plants with branches and reticulated leaf-veins, to which the apple and the rose belong. The same numerical relations may be traced in the animal kingdom; three being the number of joints in the typical finger and the regnant number in the crustacea; while five prevails among vertebrate animals, and is of frequent occurrence among marine forms of life, being the law of growth of star-

fishes, sea-urchins, and the like. A curious series, in ancient times supposed to possess mystical virtues before it was discovered in nature, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, etc., in which any two numbers added together give the succeeding one, regulates the general arrangement of leaves round the stem of plants, and the scales round the cone of a pine or a fir. In every department of nature—from the quantitative laws that regulate the distances, movements, and attractions of the stars of heaven, to the arithmetical laws of definite proportions and equivalents which lie at the basis of all the compositions and decompositions of the substances of the earth, and the numerical relations that are found among all the living creatures, animal and vegetable, that exist on the land, and in the air and water—physical science shows that recurrent or typical numbers have a most important place and influence, and constitute the *Principia* of the universe. The more our studies and researches extend, the more numerous and striking do we find the proofs and illustrations of the fact, perceived long ago by the great philosophers, that numbers pre-existing in the Divine mind form the model according to which all things are brought together and linked in order.

It is a strange thought that the typical number of teeth, barely visible to the naked eye, in the seed-vessel of a minute moss, should be thus correlated with the numerical arrangements in the highest plants and animals, in the body of man himself, and among the stars of heaven. It shows, in a most interesting way,

the unity of the universe, the unity of the Being who causes all its phenomena, and the unity of the plan by which these phenomena are bound together. There is no physical reason, so far as we know, why the numerical law of gravitation should be what it is. We should be inclined indeed to suppose that the force of gravitation would decrease just in proportion as the distance is increased ; whereas we actually find the decrease of the force is proportioned to the square of the number expressing the distance, so that at twice the distance the force is not twice less but four times less, at thrice the distance, nine times, and so on. Similarly, no anatomical reason can be given why the number of teeth in the seed-vessel of a moss should be arranged in multiples of four, and why leaves should be arranged on their stem in a series of which any two numbers added together give the succeeding one. The fact then that the numerical law of gravitation is universal, controlling all the matter with which man is surrounded, and that certain numbers, rather than others, prevail throughout all the departments of nature, conclusively proves—on the same grounds that we establish the authorship of a book by the significant peculiarity of its style and expression—that the universe is the product of one Mind, whose geometry is the same in heaven and earth ; inorganic creation constituting its elementary, and organic its higher form.

And if we further find that in the Sacred Scriptures there is an order in respect of number—a numerical relation in the Divine dispensations and ordinances,

not unlike that which science has disclosed in nature—are we not justified in attributing the same origin to the Word as to the works? He who showed to Moses on the Mount the pattern of the tabernacle, according to which every object was constructed with the most precise numerical proportions and relations, is the same who showed to Kepler the numerical laws of the planetary movements which have formed historically the foundation of modern astronomy. And the dimensions of the altars of burnt-offering and incense, and the ark and the mercy-seat, were arranged upon the same numerical principles which regulate the disposition of the leaves of a plant around their stem, and the teeth of a moss round the mouth of its seed-vessel. It was as imperative that the altars should be four square, so representing the completeness and fulness of the work effected thereon, whether of sacrifice or incense—the same perfect measure and estimate being thus presented every way, whether towards God or towards man—as that the teeth of a tiny moss gleaming under the sunbeam on its woodland bank should be in fours and multiples of fours, so indicating the uniformity and perfection of the plan upon which the whole great class of plants to which it belongs is modelled. The law which arranges the series of leaves round a stem, so that any two numbers added together shall form the succeeding one, is of the same character as the law which ordained the brazen altar to be of such dimensions as to be capable of including all the other vessels of the sanctuary within it, and to be

exactly twice the size of the ark. We cannot interpret the meaning of the law in the case of plants, but we can understand, in the case of the altar, that the numerical facts were intended to foreshadow, first, that every priestly ministration is involved in or connected with the death of Christ, as every vessel of the tabernacle was smaller than, and could be included in, the sacrificial altar; and secondly, that intercourse with God, of which the ark is the symbol and the medium, results from the fact of sacrifice, and is closely connected with it, as the size of the ark was dependent upon the size of the altar. From all these considerations, and many more of a similar nature that might be urged, the conclusion is irresistible that nature and revelation have one Author; and we are impressively taught that the law of the Lord, whether expressed in His Word or in His works, is perfect.

2. Another lesson we learn from this subject is the intimate correspondence between the Mind that planned the universe and the mind that is in ourselves. The principles upon which God acts in regard to the numerical relations in all parts of His works are principles thoroughly intelligible to man himself; and the fact that human sagacity has actually discovered and scientifically demonstrated these laws of numerical proportions is a clear indication that there is the closest link between man's reason and the Supreme Intelligence by which all things have been ordered. No other creature possesses this capacity. Animals show many points of resemblance to man in regard to

power of affection, association, memory, wilfulness faintly resembling man's freedom of action, and even some degree of moral sense. But they have shown no sign that they possess the power to apprehend the relations of number. In this respect there is an impassable gulf between man and all the other creatures ; and we are driven to the conclusion that man must have derived this unique power, not from a creature origin, but directly from the Creator Himself. And the fact that man is able to make use of numerical relations in all his own works and in all the details of his life, shows that he is indeed made in the image of Him who makes use of the same relations in the ordering of His universe. If we find arithmetical sums or geometrical problems traced on the black-board of a deserted schoolroom, we know as surely that a mind conversant with numbers had been engaged upon them as if we actually saw the teacher or the pupil at work. Why should we hesitate to come to the same conclusion when we see the same or similar arithmetical sums and geometrical problems wrought out by an invisible Hand in the parts of living creatures—of plants and animals? In regard to the moral link between the human race and its divine Author there may be some uncertainty, owing to the fact that we have lost our holiness, and have no infallible standard of righteousness within us. That part of the image of God in which we were created has been lost or effaced ; but in regard to our intellectual power of discerning the relations of number pervading all His workmanship, and regulating all our

own doings also, there is no uncertainty. We worship, so far as this quality is concerned, no longer at an altar to the unknown God; and we are no longer dubious that "we are His offspring." When I count the petals of a flower, or follow the spiral arrangement of leaves on the branch of an apple-tree, or mark the carefully numbered divisions of the tiny membrane which closes the fruit-vessel of a moss, I discover in myself, with feelings of solemn awe, a capacity for entering into ideas which permeate the whole universe, and which must, therefore, be ever-present in the mind of Him who created and upholdeth all things. Kepler deeply realized this when, in reference to his numerical discoveries among the orbs of heaven, he gloried in the conviction that he had been privileged "to think the thoughts of God." And the Christian should feel it with even greater power when it is his privilege and consolation to address God as One who acts towards him on principles intelligible to his own understanding, and in accordance with that rule of everlasting righteousness which He has written in his heart—who says to him in all his approaches to the mercy-seat, "Come now, and let us *reason* together."

3. And this brings me to notice another lesson which may be deduced from this subject, viz., that God deals with us as He deals with all His creatures, according to the law of numerical proportion. What a world of meaning, looking at them in the light of our present reflections, is in the words addressed by God to His people, as twice recorded by Jeremiah—"Fear thou

not, O Jacob my servant: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee *in measure.*" When the foundations of the earth were laid, we know that God arranged all things, both according to proportion and to place—that He "measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out the heavens with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance." We know with equal certainty that His covenant of grace is a similar system of exquisite adaptations and compensations—that it is *ordered in all things* and sure. And if the mathematician can demonstrate that the leaves of a plant are arranged around its stem so as to give them the fairest possible freedom of access to air and light, and the planets placed at such distances from the sun as to give them the fairest possible chance of revolving around him undisturbed by their neighbours, surely the Christian can prove from his own experience and observation that God "performeth the thing that is appointed," and adapts His special dealings to the circumstances and necessities of His people. He who telleth the number of the stars and calleth them all by their names, has assured us that in His book all our members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there were none of them; and that since we were born He numbereth our steps, that the number of our months is with Him, that our times are in His hand, that even the very

hairs of our head are all numbered. The conclusion therefore is as irresistible as it is welcome, that we need not fear any of the ills of life, for they could have no power at all against us, except it were given them from above by One who is too wise to err, and who so loved us that He did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. In our sorest affliction He keepeth all our bones ; not one of them is broken.

All these precious thoughts are brought home with greater power and tenderness to our hearts because the object that suggests them is not one of the mighty things of creation, but one of the smallest and humblest. Our Lord's argument with regard to the lilies of the field has even greater force to those who can appreciate it, when it comes from the inconspicuous bloom of a moss which needs the microscope to disclose its beauty and wonder. It teaches us that it is the production, not of One who is infinitely great and far removed from us, so that we can only reverently admire Him at an immeasurable distance ; but of One who in His unfathomable love has come down and assumed our nature, and who cares for the minutest things of our individual life. When we look up and consider the heavens, the work of God's fingers, we are awed and dwarfed into insignificance in our own estimation ; but when we look down and consider the lowly moss that adorns the wayside wall, we recover the sense of our individuality, and feel that we are of more value than all these things. And just as in human experience it is not the bestowal of costly gifts, which may be

conferred by a careless hand at a distance, which binds us to our fellow-creatures, but the little loving services of daily life which imply that the giver and receiver meet in personal contact ; so it is not the great truths of our salvation, nor the great bounties of God's natural providence, which impress us with a sense of His nearness and fill our hearts with love to Him : but the intimate details and familiar scenes of our Saviour's sojourn on earth, and the little happinesses that God confers upon us in the common by-paths of life. When we study the wonderful arrangements in the seed-vessel of the unheeded moss, whereby its safety is cared for, and its humble ministry in the world is carried on, we have a proof before our eyes how infinitely God can condescend, and with what confidence we may cry, "Abba, Father," and feel that all things under His wise and loving care will work together for our good. We hear the meek and lowly Jesus, who took the little children in His arms and blessed them, saying to us in regard to the little moss too, "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones." For if he who humbleth himself as a little child is greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he who regardeth the little moss will find that it has more than the wisdom of Solomon to teach him.

4. Mosses, as a rule, grow in very exposed situations and amid the most primitive conditions. They come into contact directly with the severe forces of the inorganic world, having often no mediator between them and the naked hardness of the rock and the rigid

inhospitalities of the sky. They belong to inclement seasons and climates, being mostly in perfection during the winter months ; and although they are found in all parts of the world, some of the largest and loveliest species growing in the deep shades of tropical and sub-tropical forests, yet as a class their maximum exists in the north temperate and polar regions, where the skies are always grey and cold, and the mists and rains in which they luxuriate are almost constantly present. To such desolate places, especially when lit up with the mimic sunshine of the primrose and in the deeper shades the pale moonlight of the sorrel and the anemone, they impart no small share of that tender pathetic beauty in the landscape which in northern lands comes home with irresistible power to the heart. They form the first film of verdure that gathers over the newly-formed soil, and cover with a veil of delicate beauty the ravages made by the storm and the glacier on the mountain peak. They afford a striking proof how nature loves to do gentle things even in her most savage moods. I have seen the track of a winter avalanche which had mown down great pines as if they had been blades of grass, lined with the softest and greenest moss, and the dry bed of an old torrent that had cleft the side of a hill from top to bottom and scattered destruction in its path, spread over with a rich velvet carpet of the same beautiful material, out of which grew myriads of forget-me-nots, whose brilliant petals waving in the breeze and flashing in the sunlight, looking like a little blue stream that had come direct

from the sky, perpetuated the memory of the sparkle and murmur of the vanished water. In carrying on their beneficent ministry of repairing the gaunt ruins and healing the severe wounds of nature, mosses encounter unprotected the pitiless violence of the elements, the bitter cold and the scorching heat, the drenching rain and the arid drought. And like a desert spring that supplies the wants of every creature that comes to it, but is obliged to resort to heaven for its own supply, so the moss that shelters and blesses objects higher in the scale of life than itself, is dependent for its support entirely on the influences of the sky. Rooted in the clayey soil, or on the bare rock, it extracts its nourishment solely from the viewless air, weaving the sunbeams and the dews into tissues that are hardly less delicate and exquisite in their golden radiance and transparent purity. It gathers about its tiny roots the grains of rock which its slow attrition has worn away, and the particles of white dust which the wind has whirled to its bleak home; and over these spoils from the mineral kingdom it raises its soft silken cushions, and lays the green foundation upon which flowers and trees may afterwards build their beautiful and complicated structures.

The lichen-crust is but an enamel on the face of the stone, or a grey rosette on the aged tree; the alga is but a slippery green gleet on the rocky channel of the stream, or a tress of naiad hair floating on the snowy current. All these plants at the bottom of the scale of vegetation creep flat upon the surface of the inorganic

world, out of whose chaos they have barely emerged. The low vitality of these humble organisms is scarce able to overcome the gravitation of the inert mineral world. But the moss strikes the key-note of a new ascending series that overcomes the earthward force, and lifts its fairy domes into the sky. It is the first thing endowed with life that rises above the rock and aspires towards the source of the sunshine and the dew by which it is sustained. It was the first green leaf which the Spirit that brooded like a dove over the primeval waters brought out of the universal chaos that was without form and void. In it we see for the first time the marvellous ministry of the green leaf, purifying the foul air by fixing it into shapes of beauty, and creating living matter out of dead earth, and thus preparing a world in which higher life could breathe, and finally feel and think. In it we have for the first time the distinctions of root, stem, foliage, flower, fruit and seed so familiar to us, which enter into our most simple conceptions of plant-form. The lichen shares the eternal passivity and sameness of the rocks, but the moss exhibits for the first time in the history of living things the pathetic mystery of change, swaying perpetually between birth and dissolution. It feels the sweet influences of the Pleiades, and puts on a fresh tint of living green with the tassels of the larch ; it unfolds its little forest of seed-vessels under the long lingering light of the April afternoons ; and its leaves are touched with the hectic hues of the autumn decay. The waves of revival and decadence ebb and flow in its hidden cells ;

and growth and death counterbalance each other on its little unheeded stage. Had we the eyes of the little countless tribes of insects that find in its tangled mazes all the scenery that they need to shelter and support them, the moss-tuft would be to us what the woodland and the forest are now, and we should see in it the same vicissitudes marking the varying seasons of the year.

Most admirably has the moss been adapted for the part which it serves in the economy of nature, not only by the structure of its single individuals, but also by its social habit. Not only is the foliage by its shape and character fitted to endure the extremes of temperature, of dryness and moisture, and the fructification so simple and yet so efficient that it cannot fail of success even in the most unfavourable circumstances, but the habit of the whole moss tribe is to grow in thick tufts and thus secure to the individual the solidarity of a multitude. This habit is one of the most remarkable things connected with this curious class of plants. It is a wise provision for securing both prominence and security. The little single moss would be inconspicuous ; it would have no effect in clothing the nakedness of the soil and making the surface upon which it grew picturesque. It would besides be powerless in resisting the hostile influences opposed to its welfare, and would speedily perish. But in the form of a tuft or aggregated mass of individuals, the united force of the whole can overcome the physical evils that would be fatal to the single plant. The purpose of the moss can also be achieved more perfectly through the tuft than through

the individual. It is in this form made more permanent, the individual dying but the tuft enduring ; and gathering all its powers into a common storehouse, the moss community attracts to itself a far larger share of the attention of the beneficent powers of nature than could possibly be bestowed upon any one of the units of which it is composed separately. The moss in its tufted form affords to its individuals the same protection and help which a dense forest affords to its trees. If these trees stood in the open a brisk wind would throw them down, or a hot sun dry them up ; but in the shelter of this nursery of nature they are fostered, and struggle up through the gloom branchless and leafless till their whole pent-up life bursts out together, and they are crowned at a great height with a dense canopy of foliage, all their glory at the top ; and so with the moss-forest. It is to this social habit of mosses that we owe the picturesque beauty which they impart to our old walls and secluded sanctuaries of nature. What can be lovelier than the soft green cushions, composed of myriads of individuals uniting all their charms together, which they spread over the bank of some woodland stream, stealing all noises from the intruding foot, and inviting with the delicious play of light and shade that flickers over them to noontide rest and dreamy meditation : or the emerald bracelets which they clasp round the knotted arms of the forest trees, imitating the jewel in the brilliancy of its lustre and the endurance of its verdure !

The key to this social habit of the moss is man, to

whom it points onward in the order of creation and upward in the scale of life. The mystery can only be fully explained by his social life. In him the highest exemplification of its meaning and use are the words of the sacred writer, "Two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not easily broken." There is a Greek proverb that says, "One man, no man." A single isolated human being knows little of the mysteries of his own being, of the universe around him, or of the nature and relations of God. The dimensions of his being contract; its quality deteriorates; he parts one by one with the great essential attributes of humanity, those which raise him above the level of the beasts that perish. But when he is united with his fellows the bounds of his being are enlarged. He sees with their eyes and feels with their hearts. He knows more of himself, more of God, more of the universe. There are duties we should never understand or perform except by association with our fellows. "A man's belief," says Novalis, "gains quite infinitely when he has convinced another thereof." Our consciences are strengthened by the sight of each other; and the consciousness of being members of a larger body helps immensely all our efforts to resist temptation, to do what is right, and to help on the cause of truth and love. And just as by the mixture of chemical substances results are obtained which are not found in the separate ingredients, so by the association of human beings with each other, outward actions and inward traits of the soul are realized which would have no existence in the

single individual. "It is not good for man to be alone ;" and this law of God is expressed in the original plan of his constitution. The social state is not a discovery of his own, or an accident of his circumstances ; it is an essential element in his complex organization, existing from the very beginning. It was not a number of isolated units, but a social body which God contemplated when He said, "Let us make man in our own image ;" and prefigurations of that design and preparations for carrying out that appointment were made from the foundation of the world.

We have thus found the key to the social habit of the moss to be man ; and as man is the key that explains the meaning and use of the social condition of all the lower organisms, so the Church of the living God is the key that explains the social condition of man. It is for the purpose of bringing out and educating to the utmost the nature of man that the social life and social worship of the Church are designed. As members of the Church we find ourselves partakers of a corporate life and a history larger than our own. By association with our fellow-members our view-point is elevated and our horizon widened. Our own experience is individual and special ; our own capacities are narrow and limited, and therefore it is but a small part of the love that passeth knowledge that we know, and of the fulness of God that we are filled with. Others possess qualities in which we are deficient, and are led in ways that we know not ; others bring out new relations of God that

we have not realized, and enter into larger and wider fields of thought and action. The members of each congregation, the members of each Church, through their communion with one another, rise to higher conceptions of the Divine nature, and attain to richer experiences of the Divine grace than would be possible to any one of them in a separate isolated state. This great truth is beginning to be more recognized than it ever was before. Christians of different names and denominations are feeling the need of confederation and co-operation ; and are realizing that their differences may help to bring out new or forgotten aspects of Christian truth, and to enlarge their view of it as a whole.

5. Closely connected with the social habit of the moss is its power of branching—multiplying itself by self-extension. Some species of moss have simple stems ; and these are more fugacious, having a less hold upon the supplies of life, and smaller forces to overcome their enemies. Others are much branched and last for years. Examples of the two kinds are found in the little peculiar group to which the Mungo Park moss belongs. As a rule the mosses that produce their seed-vessel from the summit of the stem are simple and unbranched, and may therefore be said to be analogous to annuals among flowering plants, which perish whenever they have produced their blossom and seed ; while mosses that send forth their seed-vessel from the side of the stem are much branched and are analogous to perennial plants, which are provided with the means

of continuing not only the species but the individual, and therefore last for many years. The family of the Mungo Park moss, though it produces the seed-vessel from the top of the stem, nevertheless branches profusely by innovations, or with the tops of the fertile stems several times divided. This family, therefore, is very enduring, and forms one of the principal features in the mossy decoration of the woodland banks and trees.

In this branching of the tiny moss we have the earliest premonition of the corporate relationships of life. We are so familiar with this fact that it has become a commonplace and uninteresting truism which lies bed-ridden in the dormitory of the soul. But when we trace it back to its first feeble beginning in the first kind of life that rose out of the forces and forms of the inorganic world, we realize something of its wonder and significance. All beginnings have a strange interest to us, whether it be the source of a mighty river in the little mountain well or the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the performance of the first miracle or the formation of the Christian Church. The thought that there was a time when these things had no existence gives a vividness to the feelings with which we regard them, and brings back the freshness that has evaporated with long familiarity. We are familiar with the relations of human life; but it is strange to go back to a time when there was nothing like them,—when life consisted of units. The angels that were in existence before man had no corporate life. They were created as mere

individuals, whose number from the first was fixed and perfect. They came direct from the hand of God ; and thus were the sons of God, but were not the sons of one another. They had no father, or son, or brother—no blood-relationship. And therefore we can understand how the Lord Jesus could not have taken upon Him the nature of angels. Between Him and these beings there could be no federal tie through the possession of a common nature acquired by hereditary descent. And we can understand with what profound interest the angels would desire to look into the mystery of the creation of a being who should be so different from themselves, who should inherit the Divine blessing of being fruitful, and multiplying and replenishing the earth, with all that it involves of sorrow and joy—of spiritual education and probationary discipline. Through the social relationships of man a way was prepared for the incarnation of the second Adam, “the Lord from heaven,” in whom creation and the Creator met together—not in semblance but in reality—in whom all fulness dwells—the fulness of the creature as well as the fulness of the Creator. And through this relationship resting on a participation of our flesh and blood, man has the hope of nearer and more blessed communion with God than even angels or archangels know.

Regarding the organization and the highest social well-being of man then as the ultimate end of creation, and taking specially into account the manifest uniformity and continuity in the plans observed by the Creator

throughout all the formations of the earth, it is surely not a vain imagination to suppose that in the constitution of the lower forms of vegetable and animal life, which were made by Him long ages before man, He who seeth the end from the beginning, and to whom a thousand years are as one day, should have had an eye to the constitution of the wonderful being that was one day to occupy the highest place in the organic world. We cannot but suppose that God worked up to this new thing in His universe, as His manner always is, by hints and forecasts of it in lower and earlier forms. He traced, in the structure and habits of the first emerald tuft of moss that crept over the newly-formed soil, the first faint indication of the idea that was to be unfolded in all its wonderful fulness of meaning in the human world. The moss-tuft composed of its branching and mutually related individuals, had its real origin in man, its primary source in man's moral nature, and its true meaning in the institution of man's social condition; that condition for which God made provision in the formation of man, which He inaugurated when He gave him a help-meet, taken as a rib from his side, and which He means to perfect and complete in that heavenly "city" towards which from the first the desires of man and the preparations of God have been alike directed.

6. A compact tuft or cushion of moss is a solid mass that has a smooth surface and a rounded outline. It is like the uniform pile of plush or velvet, as even and as closely pressed together. We know how the velvet or

the plush pile is produced, by the sharp knife of the manufacturer passing over the woven and rugged threads under heavy pressure. But what shears of Atropos cut each individual thread of life in those smooth, soft, rounded cushions of green and gold to the same size? How much has been sacrificed to gain that uniformity of surface! No single moss is allowed to grow at its own sweet will, but is trimmed in its Procrustes' bed by an inexorable law—by the same law which has shaped the crystals in the rock upon whose surface it grows. Each individual is adapted to its own place in the mossy mound, diminishing in size from the centre where the cushion is thickest to the edge where it is thinnest! The separate filaments, though independent of each other, are subdued to the same spherical obedience as the round dome of the full-foliaged tree whose branches and twigs radiate from a common central stem. We have the interpretation of this peculiarity in the economy of the moss-tuft in the higher world of man, where the same social law moulds the tastes, characters, and habits of the individuals who live together. They grow to one uniform likeness. Should each individual insist upon having his mathematically exact due, there can be no such thing as general harmony or social life at all. Should each be determined to stand upon his absolute rights, there will be painful discord throughout the community; but, on the other hand, if each yields a little to his neighbour, and circumscribes a little of his own individuality in order to make room for his neighbour's, there will be an

agreeable unity of sentiment and unanimity of life. It is no more possible to secure harmony among Church members unless in honour they prefer one another, than it is to secure harmony among musical notes unless each is tuned a little lower than its exact due to suit the next note. Only when the ends of God's discipline in us and with us here are accomplished, shall we be brought to the perfect *enharmonic* condition in heaven, in which each shall have his exact absolute right, and yet be in perfect accordance and sympathy with all others.

And this self-sacrifice of its own fair proportions which each single moss in the tuft must make in order to accommodate its neighbour, is still further carried on in the way in which the whole tuft is developed. Take to pieces and examine carefully any little cushion of moss from the nearest wall, and you will find that it consists of two layers; the upper of a rich vivid green, and the lower of a dark brown or black colour. The former is living and growing, and the latter is decaying or dead. The moss-tuft grows in what is called a proliferous manner, that is by young shoots springing from the sides or summits of the old ones, and thus often increasing many feet in depth, and forming layer above layer, the uppermost stratum alone being vital, the rest decomposed into peat forming a rich organic soil for its nourishment. Ruskin calls the dark colour of the lower layer "the funereal blackness" of the moss tuft, inasmuch as it is in that way that the moss-leaves die, not of a visible decay and falling, like the leaves of

trees, but invisibly in continual succession beneath the ascending crest. Their final duty is to die ; their main task is not, like other leaves, in their life, but in their death : to form by their decay and decomposition the soil out of which first the topmost crest of the moss-tuft, all green and bright, may be formed, to drink in the dew and to gleam in the sunshine, and then higher forms of life, the flowers to assume the colours of the rainbow, and the cedars to cover the earth with their shadow. “None teach so well the humility of death ;” the sacrifice of one generation that another may come in its place ; the sacrifice of one epoch of thought and effort that a higher state of progress may be reached ; the self-sacrifices that respond to a parent’s tenderness and a friend’s devotion, the root of which is love ; the presenting ourselves a living sacrifice, which is the ground of all true performance of duty to the family, the Church, and the world. The moss-tuft interprets in higher form what the rock—crumbling away in death in order that its dust may afford support to the plant—itself proclaims. All lower things live unconsciously for the sake of higher things. Everywhere beneath is life unfolding through struggle, suffering, and death. And the highest sacrifice of all, the laying down of His own life upon the cross by the Son of God, that we might not perish but have everlasting life, is the key that explains the mystery hid from the foundation of the world—the mystery of the growth of the first moss-tuft on the rock whose green leaves above, that never withered, were nourished by the dark leaves beneath

that existed but to wither—and the mystery later on of the germination of the first corn of wheat that fell into the ground and died, and so brought forth much fruit.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STATUE AND THE STONE.

"Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces."—DANIEL ii. 34.

IN primitive times dreams were often used as the mediums of Divine intimations. "In slumberings upon the bed," says Elihu, "God openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction." Prophets and others were thus brought into immediate contact with things lying beyond the reach of human discernment, and coming events of weal or woe cast their shadows before. The boundary of reason and consciousness, which hems in men's minds like the glass chimney of a lamp during the waking hours, was removed during sleep, in order that the flame of knowledge might be increased and flicker out farther into the darkness. So was it with Nebuchadnezzar. He saw in a vivid vision of the night, based upon representations of outward things familiar to him in his waking moments, a huge Colossus towering up to heaven, and covering with its

own vast bulk and the shadow which it projected a large space of ground. It was in human form, but terrible in its exaggerated proportions and fierceness of expression. It was composed of various metals—the head of pure gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet part of iron and part of clay. It reflected from its polished surface a radiance that dazzled the eyes. Gazing upon this monstrous embodiment of grandeur and terror, he saw from a neighbouring mountain-side a small stone cut out from the quarry, raised from its place and flung by viewless hands with tremendous force against the colossal image; which immediately fell with a loud crash to the ground, and was broken to atoms and swept away by the rising wind caused by its own fall, like the chaff of the summer threshing-floor. The stone that effected this amazing destruction then grew larger and larger before his eyes, until at last it became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

With the general interpretation of this remarkable dream given by Daniel we are all familiar; but there are some most interesting details of contrast between the statue and the stone, upon which it may be profitable to meditate. The first point of contrast is the *enormous bulk* of the statue, as compared with the *smallness* of the stone. Man estimates the importance of things by their size and appearance. Vast proportions produce a feeling of awe; and primitive races strove to minister to this feeling by building gigantic structures which would exalt the idea of human

genius in contrast with man's personal insignificance. The idol which the Babylonish monarch saw in his dream was in harmony with the huge monoliths, temples, and human-headed bulls which formed the architectural ornaments of his capital. Its colossal size admirably represented the material power and extent of his kingdom. Mere bulk and physical massiveness were the characteristics of the great empires of antiquity. But God's thoughts are not as man's thoughts. In nature He accomplishes His mightiest operations by the most insignificant agencies. The limestone rocks which constitute so large a portion of the earth's crust are formed, not of the bones of huge animals, but of minute shells. Large islands are created by the labours of tiny coral polyps. And as in nature, so in grace. The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard-seed, which is the least of all the seeds that be in the earth. God chooses the weak things to confound the mighty, and things that are not to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh may glory in His presence. What was Palestine but a very little country among the mighty continents of the earth? And what was Israel but an insignificant people in comparison with the great nations of antiquity? And was not Bethlehem where Jesus was born one of the least of the cities of the land, and the house of Joseph among the poorest and most obscure families in it? The barley cake of Israel overthrew the tent of the Midianites, and the small stone of God's kingdom upset the mighty idols of the world's empire.

2. Another point of contrast is the *heterogeneous character* of the statue, as compared with the *homogeneous nature* of the stone. The statue was composed of gold and silver, iron and clay; and these substances were moulded and held together in a human shape, not by a vital organization, nor by chemical affinity, but by mere mechanical force. And in this respect the statue graphically represented the outward symmetry of the great world-kingdoms of antiquity, which was the result, not of a natural spontaneous association, but of a forced union of discordant elements by human power. The might of the autocrats of Egypt, Assyria, and Rome blended together races and creeds that had no natural affinity or sympathy with each other into one form of government, one mode of political life, and one mould of religious profession. This hard mechanical uniformity was secured by crushing the instincts of human nature, and the liberties of the individual. And hence there was a constant tendency in this compulsory unity towards disintegration. On the slightest temptation there was a fierce attempt made to throw off the hated yoke; and frequent revolutions, and chronic internal dissensions showed how forced and unnatural was the compression. And as with these mighty kingdoms of old, which over-weighted and overshadowed the world, so is it with every combination which men form for their own wicked and selfish purposes. It is a forced and unnatural association. There is no real unanimity. The kingdom of Satan is a kingdom divided against itself,

and therefore cannot stand. Men who hate each other, and have nothing otherwise in common, will combine for some wicked purpose, like Herod and Pilate, who became friends over the condemnation of Jesus, or like the chief priests and the traitor Judas, who conspired together to take Him. But the unhallowed alliance has in it a principle of schism, and Herod speedily accuses Pilate to his imperial master, and the chief priests say to the conscience-stricken traitor who has come to them with the price of blood, "What is that to us? See thou to it."

But widely different was the stone, which symbolized the kingdom of heaven. It was a homogeneous substance. All its particles were of the same nature, and they were held together by the law of mutual cohesion and chemical affinity. The same force that united these particles into this compact form, changing the mud at the bottom of the ocean, or the sand on its shore, by pressure under massive rocks, or by the induration of volcanic outbursts into stone, still held these particles together because of their similarity, and resisted the processes of weathering to which they were exposed. The stone of the vision was no conglomerate or breccia in which pebbles or fragments of different minerals were held together by mechanical force, but in all likelihood, judging from the geological formation of the region where the vision occurred, a mass of limestone or marble, whose substance was homogeneous—composed of the same calcareous sediment, which fire and pressure had metamorphosed

into this solid and enduring form. And how strikingly in this respect did it symbolize the city of God, which is compactly built together—the kingdom of God, which is composed of those who are all one in Christ Jesus. Believers have a strong family resemblance. They all bear the likeness of their Father and Elder Brother, and consequently of one another. Notwithstanding their individual peculiarities, and their varieties of character, culture, and circumstance, they are all essentially one, after the image of God's unity, and consequently of His eternity. Their unity is not legal, but spiritual; not of dull uniformity, but of bright unanimity. Rooted and grounded in mutual love, they comprehend with all saints the love that passeth knowledge, and are filled with the fulness of God. "There is one body, one spirit, and one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all."

3. Another point of contrast is the *limitation* of the statue, as compared with the *illimitable development* of the stone. The statue was of gigantic size, but its human shape circumscribed its boundaries. Its outlines were rigidly determined. And this was the characteristic of the vast empires of antiquity, which, almost as soon as they were formed, became stereotyped and incapable of progress. They speedily crystallized into a permanence and immobility of aspect like the changeless deserts and plains out of which they had emerged. The pyramids, with their

broad base and enormous bulk and fixed limits, represented the primitive civilization of Egypt. The human-headed bulls, and the other huge idols strangely combining the human and the brutal, for which Nineveh and Babylon were distinguished, were expressive symbols of the state of Assyria, in which the mental freedom and independence of men were still held in bondage by the lower powers of nature. When the light of history dawns upon these empires they are seen to be completely organized ; uniform and universal law, education, government, moulded all their subjects to one type of character, and trained them to an unquestioning obedience. Unassisted human nature had reached in the Egyptian, Assyrian, and Roman empires its utmost limits, and disclosed its fullest capacities ; and we see how incapable it was of bringing anything to perfection—how stunted and stereotyped all its mightiest efforts were. China has lived for two thousand years upon the work of five centuries ; it has never got beyond the doctrines of Confucius as explained and unfolded by Menucius. Five or six centuries cover the whole ground of Greek history from the rise of Sparta to the fall of Corinth ; while Mahometan civilization in all its essentials completed and stereotyped itself in the first three hundred years of its existence.

In striking contrast with the fixed limits and definite proportions of these human civilizations is the indefinite size and shape of the kingdom of God. The stone is an appropriate symbol of it, the rough

stone taken out of the quarry—the amorphous boulder lying on the moor, not the stone crystallized into the mathematical facets of the gem. The statue, moulded by human art, shares in the limitations of man's own nature. Made by God, the stone shares in His infinitude. The mystic stone in the vision grew and expanded until it became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. The landscape consisted of itself and its shadow. It presented a different aspect from each new point of view. The uniform monotonous despotsms of antiquity were created by man for his own aggrandizement; they had therefore fixed bounds of space and duration beyond which they could not pass. But the kingdom of God is the creation of Divine love and grace, and therefore it unfolds with the need of man, and develops new capacities of blessing him, and endures for ever.

The image of the stone does not suitably convey this idea. Every stone, however rough, has a limit as fixed as the statue. But the idea of fixed shape is not so inherent in the stone as in the statue. A stone may be of any shape—may be weathered by the elements, or roughened by violent contact with other stones into the most varied forms; but a human statue must preserve the human shape and observe the fixed proportions of the human form. So, in like manner, the idea of development is not inherent in a stone. It is of a fixed size; it cannot become larger. But Scripture imparts the power of growth to it, and secures, by a combination of images, what one alone cannot effect. We see

this in the union of ideas borrowed from the mineral and vegetable kingdoms—from architecture and plant life—in some of the images employed to designate the Christian Church and the Christian life. “In whom all the *building* framed together, *groweth* into an holy temple in the Lord”; “*Rooted and grounded in love.*” We see it in the tradition of the Targumists, partially adopted by St. Paul and used as a Christian image—that the rock which Moses smote followed the Israelites in all their wanderings through the wilderness, and furnished water to every man at his own tent door; the Christian application of it implying the adaptation of the Gospel of Jesus to all the circumstances of man—marching with him in all his progress, and ministering to all his wants wherever he finds himself. The grandeur of the Bible gives the grandeur of its own conceptions to every comparison it uses, expands its powers and imparts to it qualities which it does not inherently possess, and thus makes it more elastic to represent the expansive force of the kingdom of God. There is nothing fixed or stereotyped in this kingdom. It has a wonderful power of adjustment and assimilation. It expands its horizon as humanity progresses. It grows with human growth. As with a mountain, whose true greatness—foreshortened when seen from the plain—can only be ascertained at its own height, the higher we ascend, the higher it rises up before us, and its top, from the utmost point of our attainment, is lost in the clouds. The most progressive nations have found the most significance in its eternal truths; and the greater

our individual growth in grace, the more we have cause to exclaim : “ Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out ! ”

The statue remained as it was, a monument of human pride and weakness, casting a small shadow before it in the dreary desert which it did nothing to relieve ; the stone grew into a huge mountain which served the most important purposes in the economy of the world, sent down from its summit the cooling winds and refreshing rains and fertilizing streams which redeemed the wastes of the earth, and made the wilderness and the solitary place to be glad, and the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

The idea of growth is inherent in the Christian religion. It has created for itself a literature and an art in which progress is essential. The horizontalism and exact regularity of Greek and Assyrian architecture expressed the permanence and immutability of the religious system associated with it ; while the verticalism and endless variety of the Gothic architecture embodied in a physical form the ideas of advancement, elevation, and progress contained in the Christian religion, which has chosen that style of art for its own. The religions of the heathen keep man as he is—confined to the earth, limited and bounded on every side by the restrictions and incapacities of his faith ; the religion of Jesus raises man from the ground, lifts up his nature to another world, arouses his intellect and lightens his cares, bursts the fetters of his flesh, sublimes his affec-

tions, fills the whole sphere of his vision with grand and aspiring spectacles, and embodies itself in structures which exhibit a similar analogy. The religion that will satisfy the soul is a religion that makes provision for its growth and expansion, that shares in the infinitude and indefinite progressiveness of man. The stone *must* destroy the statue. The stone of the Gospel—the Rock Christ Jesus—that has no fixed shape, but grows and adapts itself to the growing necessities of the race and the individual, must conquer and destroy the statue that has a definite shape and fixed limits—the creed of the Pharisee, the Mahometan, and the Pagan, that bounds man's spirit with its hard, monotonous, mechanical lines.

4. Another point of contrast is the *brilliant appearance* of the statue, and the *value* of the materials of which it is composed, as compared with the *meanness* and *commonness* of the stone, and the *worthlessness* of its substance. With the exception of the clay, out of which its extremities were partly moulded, all the other materials used in the composition of the statue were exceedingly valuable according to the human standard. The gold and silver of the head and breast were the most precious of all substances, the symbols of human wealth and the representations of human glory and power; the gold, the sacred metal, employed in the sacred services of the world, and the silver employed in the every-day uses of common life—as money passed from hand to hand, “the pale and common drudge between man and man.” The brass which formed the

middle part of the statue was the metal of which the armour of the ancients—the breastplate and the gyves—was made ; and the iron of the legs and feet was the metal which, stronger and more useful than all the others, was the symbol of man's proud position on the earth, and his power to subdue all its elements to his use. These materials are the highest forms which the mineral kingdom assumes—the sublimation of the substance of the earth, and therefore they fitly represent all the pomp and circumstance of the proud kingdoms of the world—all that is strongest, most precious, and enduring in human sovereignty.

On the other hand, the stone which smote the magnificent statue had no value or splendour. It was a rude aggregation and consolidation of the common sand or mud or dust of the earth. It was made up of the materials which are trodden under foot or employed only in the humblest uses. Who values a rough stone by the wayside? It is left unheeded where it lies, or kicked aside as an obstacle. And in this respect it is a fit symbol of the Founder of the heavenly kingdom, who, while on earth, had no form or comeliness, and was despised and rejected of men. Christ in His life and death presents no attraction to the natural eye. The stone is disallowed of men, a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence even to those which stumble at the word. His Church was the filth and offscouring of all things to the world. The subjects of His kingdom were the weak, the foolish, the ignorant, and the poor—those who, like their Master, had a

Galilean name of reproach among men. To human view, where were there ever such glory and pomp and power as the vast world-empires of antiquity possessed? And, on the other hand, where were there ever such weakness and insignificance as characterized the origin and early progress of the kingdom of Christ upon earth? And yet in the contest between them the weakness of the one was stronger than all the strength of the other. The little worthless stone smote the huge magnificent statue; and on the site where it stood, and where its very ashes were swept away by the wind of destiny, leaving not a wreck behind, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.

The dream of the night has become the grandest fact of history; the vision of a heathen monarch has become the reality of Christendom; and every age will give the vision and the dream a grander and yet grander interpretation. God has made the stone which the builders rejected the headstone of the corner; and on it is built all that is most precious and enduring in the world—the Church which was bought with the blood of Christ, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail. The living stones built upon the Living Stone will partake of the life, durability, and value of their foundation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SWALLOW'S NEST.

"The swallow hath found a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God."—PSALM lxxxiv. 3.

THIS is one of the Psalms composed when the Jewish King and nobles were carried away to Babylon. The plaintive wail of the exile is heard in each of its lines. Far away is his native land. Its mountains are too distant to make even a faint line of purple cloud at the farthest extremity of the wide plains. The captive dwells with a yearning tenderness upon the memories of the past, and contrasts his own helpless imprisonment with the liberty which his people enjoy of going on a pilgrimage to the Holy City, and taking part in the services of the Temple there. He envies even the birds of passage, which are free to go wherever they please. The swallow especially comes up before his mind, whose Hebrew name, meaning freedom, and denoting its love of liberty and the impossibility of keeping it in captivity, has a deep significance to him in his

mournful circumstances. He remembers how it used to build its nest in the narrow loopholes in the lofty stone walls surrounding the outer court of the Temple, in which the brazen altar was placed, and how he used, while engaged in the holy services, to watch its swift movements as it darted in and out, and skimmed the atmosphere in its short arrowy flights. Would that he could borrow its wings, that he might hasten to the shrine of his devotions, and enjoy the blessed privileges of the past, to which his long privation had lent a dearer value !

The swallow, like the robin and the wren, is one of the sacred birds of Christendom. It does not need to build its nest within hallowed precincts to enjoy the right of sanctuary. A gentle, humanizing superstition has connected it with the higher mysteries of the universe, and brought it within the limit of a catholic blessing. Its own beauty throws a shield of protection over it; and by rude and gentle natures alike it is regarded with a feeling of veneration akin to that which pervades the quaint rhymes of the "Ancient Mariner." It makes its nest under the lowly cottage eaves, almost within reach of eager childish hands stretched forth from the dormer window; but it is as safe and unmolested there as under the porch of the rural sanctuary, whose profound quiet is disturbed only once a week by feet of reverent worshippers. Nor can we wonder at this beautiful feeling which extends to a few favoured birds and flowers an interest in that blessed religion which guards and hallows everything that God has made, as an

earnest that it shall yet embrace all nature. It has more and other beauty than the mere grace of its form and the glossy sheen of its plumage. All the past summers of life have shed their halo around it. To the careworn mind there is childhood in every twitter of its little throat, and in every flash of its purple wing. It is full of our own human heart. The reappearance every season of this little prophet of the year awakens all the glad instincts that slumber even in the coldest nature. It is associated with long days full of light and soft air and dreamy beauty, in which every one is inclined to imitate the example of the little child who woke at earliest dawn and begged to be dressed quickly, saying, "I must get up early—there is so much to do to-day; there are so many flowers to be plucked." This fairy Ariel, who is chasing summer for ever round the world, brings with it thoughts of far-off climes, which the imagination clothes with ideal charms, filling the heart with a wistful yearning, a longing for wings to flee away and be at rest. It has no connection with winter gloom or autumn decay, but comes when earth is fairest and human life is brightest. It is impossible to watch the movements of the active, joyous creature without feeling some sentiment of love towards it. The eye is fascinated, and so is the heart, by its wonderful grace and velocity as it wheels its ceaseless and untiring flight from sunrise to sunset. If one swallow does not make a summer, we certainly cannot imagine a summer without this winged seraph, that brings into our northern clime a glimpse of the glory and mystery of regions unknown.

One of the pleasantest experiences of country life is to be awakened at early morning by the twitter of the swallows, and to see the sunlight flashing upon their shining backs as they dart in and out of their nests under the eaves. The sound seems to belong more to the faint far-off world of dreams which has just been left, than to the cold, hard world of reality into which one has awakened. It has in it thoughts of things of beauty and delight that have been dreamed of or overjoyed. The nearness of the nest gives a near view of the bird ; and what a beautiful creature it is, with the glossy blue of its slender wings made for rapid flight, and the soft snowy whiteness, mingled with a tawny hue, of its breast and throat, and the quick sparkle of its fearless eye ! Scarcely less wonderful than itself is the nest which it builds, in defiance of the laws of gravity, against the smooth masonry of the gable. The nest of any bird, if we think seriously of it, is a very remarkable object. It is not a home for permanent habitation, but a place for the rearing of young, to be abandoned when that purpose is served. Although the same eyrie may be used by the eagle for many generations, and the crow may frequent the same rookery for hundreds of years, the generality of birds use their nests only for hatching and nursing. Each spring, as the season returns, the bird is guided by an instinct as undeviating as the law of gravitation, to spend weeks in building a warm and delicate abode for its future young, while all the rest of the year it seeks no other shelter for itself than what it finds among the thick branches of trees, or in the crevices of

rocks, or in holes of banks and walls. The nest varies in construction according to the purpose which it serves. If it is used only for incubation, it is of the simplest structure, being often a mere hollow scratched in the bare ground without any regard to form; if, on the other hand, it is used both for incubation and sheltering the young, it is shaped with much care and skill, an exquisitely rounded cup frosted with lichens, and packed with green moss, and lined with the softest down and hair, looking as if it had been turned on a potter's wheel. These gradations in nest architecture harmonize with the differences in the bodily structure of birds and in their habits and modes of life. We recognize a close family resemblance between the nests of birds belonging to the same species or order, although occasional differences may be detected when the situation is peculiar and the choice of materials limited.

It is supposed that the nests of birds show no progress during the long period they have been under the observation of man. The nest of the bird is commonly regarded as the equivalent of the matrix in other creatures; and the processes which go on unseen and unconsciously in their internal economy, are carried on externally by the bird, visibly and consciously, by an instinct which corresponds with the physiological law in the former case. Hence the product in the one instance is supposed to be as fixed and unalterable as in the other. But acute observers have noticed, nevertheless, that the faculty of nest-building is capable of education, and that the first attempts of young birds are much more

crude and imperfect than those of their parents, or than those which they themselves afterwards make. The best-constructed nests are formed by birds whose young remain a long time in them, and thus have more opportunity of seeing how they are made. We see almost the same display of reasoning powers in the selection of locality, choice of materials suitable for warmth and concealment, and adaptation of parts to requirements, which the savage evinces in the construction of his rude hut ; and the nests of birds do not vary less from generation to generation than the abodes of primitive man. The bird-instinct seems to be like some lost human sense, teaching it what man cannot know—the mystery of our common nature that lies beyond the reach of reason.

As the swallow's nest is intended for incubation and nursing, it is made durable and compact. It is said that men acquired the first notions of architecture from birds ; and according to this theory we are told that Doxius, the inventor of clay-houses, took the hint from the swallow's nest. The same variety characterizes the one as the other. No two in either case are exactly alike. It is from want of long-continued observation that we fail to discover any progress in the construction of the swallow's nest. M. Pouchet, who carefully studied the subject, found a decided improvement in the nests of swallows at Rouen during his own life-time. It is certain that in historical times the bird has modified its habits to some extent. In pre-Christian ages in this country there were no stone buildings.

Human habitations were mostly circular huts of woven twigs, plastered over with clay, and covered with thatch, affording no suitable coigne of vantage for "the pendant bed and procreant cradle" of this bird. In these circumstances the swallows that visited our country in those far-off days built their nests in the hollow trunks of aged trees, just as two centuries ago they did in the United States of America, and still do in those distant regions which even at the present day are but partly settled. How did they find out the many conveniences of stone dwellings for establishing their nests, and, abandoning their ancient retreats, take possession of the gables, friezes, or buttresses, which they now frequent? Did the instinct of the bird in this respect keep pace with the civilization of man?

The association of the swallow's nest with man's habitation is altogether a curious circumstance. In every department of nature we find objects that are brought into closer connection with man than others. They still continue in a wild state; they are not dependent upon human care, and yet they are never found at a distance from the haunts of man. We gather the stones of the earth around us in our dwellings, and the trees and flowers of the earth in our gardens, and the wild animals that come and go in their freedom about our homes, in token that humanity by its principles extends throughout the whole of nature, and that the Adam in us still gives all living things their names. Between the swallow's habitation and its nature there is a striking contrast. We should have

expected that a bird which is in constant motion, flying swiftly through the air, catching its prey on the wing, and hardly ever alighting on the ground, would build its nest on a branch of some slender tree, where it might be rocked by the wind like a sailor's hammock. Between such a resting-place and its own restless habits there would, in our estimation, be a suitable harmony. And yet the swallow chooses a very different kind of home. It builds in the corners and under the roofs of strong substantial human dwellings where it may be safe alike from wind and rain. It attaches its frail nest to the enduring structure of man that it may share in its endurance. It seeks, as the Psalmist tells us, the vicinity of the altar of God, the safe sanctuary of holy places.

1. And is there not a profound lesson for us in this curious contrast? We, too, are wandering creatures, finding no rest for the sole of our foot, because God has endowed us with a nature so vast that no earthly thing can satisfy it. We are pilgrims and strangers on earth. We are migratory like the swallow; and the land from whence we have come and to which we are hastening is fairer than any tropical dream of groves of palm and violet skies of unfading summer. We wear immortal wings within; and no small part of the sadness of human life arises from the incongruity between our capacities and attainments, our longings and enjoyments; between the infinite duration of our immortal spirits and the transitoriness of all things here. The fox finds its hole and the bird its

nest, and they are satisfied. Their limited nature is at home in a world that has been straitened to their wants. But man finds no nest for his hopes, no home for his affections in any created good. Our Saviour bids us consider the lilies of the field and the fowls of heaven; but the pity of our life is that we cannot be as they are—the careless, happy children of nature, for whom she richly provides, and whom she perfectly satisfies. We are the cuckoo in her nest; and even though we should be fed and clothed with unfailing regularity, without a care of our own, we should still have the burdens, the yearnings, and regrets imposed upon us, because of our Godlike nature, and the awful freedom which has been given to us to sin and to suffer. Amid the whirl of circumstances, the changes of time, and the groanings and travailings together of the whole creation because of our want of adaptation to it, and our violation by our sins of its holy peace and beauty, how needful, then, is it that we should build our trust on the Rock that is higher than ourselves; that we should seek in aim and affection and action the City which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God! God's house, and all that it represents, afford to us here the only adequate shelter, the only sure place of safety. There only do we find rest to our souls, the higher fellowship which ennobles duty, sanctifies sorrow, and enriches life above all else. There only do our burdens fall off our spirits, our cares and perplexities subside into a divine calm, and the mysteries of the world reveal a clue which guides us safely through them

to a glorious issue. There the true business of life is transacted. We need the things of the world, the sense of human fellowship in our daily life, that through them we may know God and ourselves in the light of God. But we need higher things than these, and a grander association.

2. The swallow, aerial as is its flight, transient as is its stay, graceful and ethereal as is its form, nevertheless builds its nest of the common clay of the ground ; but compensates for the seeming degradation by attaching that nest to the home of man and the very altar of God. And so God has made our bodies of the dust of the earth, and closely connected our life with it. We must make our nest of clay. But while by our bodies we belong to one set of circumstances, we belong by our souls to another and higher. Parts of a passing material world, so far as our corporeal nature is concerned, we have a personality that has nothing in common with the dust of the earth, with its decay and death. We are immortal guests dwelling within a transient house of clay that must one day crumble and fall and be resolved into the elements out of which it was built. And we, too, must build our clay-nest against the house of God, near the very altar of heaven, if its vanity and insignificance are to be redeemed, if we are to learn most richly the meaning of our discipline, and find strength to endure unto the end, and lay up provision in a storehouse which death cannot rifle.

The swallow, as we have seen, has changed its

habits within historical times. It has left the woods and frequented the haunts of man ; it has ceased to build its nest upon the trees, and with its friendly masonry has attached itself to our houses. To its own natural, less commodious dwelling, it has preferred that which is offered to it by man. And surely we may learn a lesson from it in regard to the great change of habit which we must all undergo if we are to be saved. We, too, must build the home of our spirits, not amid the passing and perishing things of the world, but amid the things that remind us of God and eternity. We are strangers and sojourners on earth ; but if we hide ourselves in the secret place of the Most High, the sure, satisfying realities that abide for ever will transform for us the vain show of the world. We shall have the same home wherever the place of our encampment may be, whether beside the sweet wells of Elim or the bitter waters of Marah ; God will cover us with His feathers, and under His wings shall we trust. And in the end we shall exchange our earthly house of this tabernacle in which we groan, and which shall be dissolved, for the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

3. The mode in which the swallow builds its nest is equally instructive. If we extend to the confiding bird the hospitality which is a duty we owe to man and beast, and leave it to rear unmolested its "loved mansionry" under our porch or above our window, it will amply reward us. We shall find that we have been entertaining an angel unawares, sent to teach us

wise and tender truths which we should do well to heed. The little creature has itself been taught by a wonderful instinct to make its nest of the size exactly necessary to contain the future young, and to furnish it in the proper manner ; and it has learned by slow degrees to modify its shape so as to afford more room for its inmates, and to protect them better from rain, cold, and foreign enemies than the old nests. The mortar with which it builds is mud from cart-ruts, sides of wells, and such like places. This it makes more adhesive by moistening it with some salivary fluid of its own, kneading it thoroughly, and forming it into a solid mass with much patience and skill, adding bits of broken straw and dry bents to make it hold together. The wisdom and foresight which the swallow displays in the use of this mortar are not unworthy of a reasoning mind. Instead of working continually at building the nest until completed, it takes more than a week for the process. Each morning it finishes a certain portion of its task by the first light of the sun, and then gives up work for the rest of the day. In this way each layer of mud has time to dry and consolidate before the next is added, and the safety of the structure is not endangered by imprudent haste. The little bird takes time to perfect its work—to make it secure and lasting ; and its patience and perseverance are rewarded in the end by finding itself the possessor of a tiny edifice of loam as wonderful and as admirably adapted for its purpose as anything which the Temple of Solomon itself had to show. It

will last many seasons, and may continue to be used as a family mansion for several generations, needing little or no repairs each spring. In this respect the swallow's nest rebukes our undue haste to accomplish our human tasks, our attempts to produce great results with the least expenditure of time and labour. This vice lies at the root of all our inferior and unstable workmanship. The nations of old built slowly, and they built as if for eternity. It is almost as difficult to dig a stone out of an old Roman building as it was to extract it from its original quarry. How different from the houses which we construct with untempered mortar, and hasty, careless workmanship, and which consequently need continual repairs, are never satisfactory, and hardly last out a single generation.

The swallow's nest has a wise lesson for us in the building of many other structures, mental and moral, as well as material. To labour steadily and to wait patiently is the precept which it enforces. Only by slow and cautious degrees can any human effort reach perfection. The secret of success is to bide our time, and allow our work to settle and acquire the compactness and solidity which mature consideration alone produces. Every day something should be attempted, something done, by which to earn our night's repose. Especially in the growth of the spiritual being, the formation of the Christian character, do we need to act upon the swallow's motto of "Haste is slow." We must not force our higher nature into premature or impatient development lest it become weak and unstable. Like all

Nature's operations, which proceed by a wise and orderly progression from the seed to the blade, and from the blade to the ear, and from the ear to the full corn in the ear, never anticipating at any stage what belongs to a more advanced one, never exhibiting an abnormal precocity, the kingdom of heaven in us should develop its germinating fulness with the same ease and quietude and steady progress. There need be no anxiety on our part in thus tarrying the Lord's leisure, for the work is His more than it is ours, and He, like every true workman, has respect unto the work of His own hands, so that what He has begun He will complete, and perfect that which concerneth us. And what we are to do in regard to the work of our own souls, we are taught by the same object-lesson to do in regard to the work of building up the house of God in the world. We must not disregard the day of small things, but labour on faithfully and patiently. What God requires is not our success, but our work, for it will teach us as nothing else can do what is the true value of our own life and that of others.

As the swallow builds its nest by minute accretions, and deems no particle of clay too small to be of use, as it makes its precious nest of the humblest materials, so let us deem no opportunity too small for service, no human being so sunk in vice and ignorance as to be beneath our regard; remembering that the nest of clay which we are constructing is for the rearing of immortal souls. And as the bird uses its own saliva, parts with a portion of its own substance, to cement its nest, so

should we expend in the precious labour of winning souls and building up this spiritual house not made with hands, not what costs us nothing, but what may involve much self-denial and self-sacrifice ; not the light toil of our leisure moments, but the sweat of our soul in our busiest ; remembering that He for whom we labour made clay of His own saliva with which to open the eyes of the blind ; and in the crowning consummation of His work gave *Himself* for us on the cross. The first creation formed us out of the dust of the earth without toil or trouble ; the new creation opens our blind eyes by the addition to the dust of the earth of a part of the very substance of the Saviour, by the expenditure of much toil, and sorrow, and suffering. And in this we must imitate His example if we are to be successful master-builders. No labour of ours will endure—form part of the eternity of God—unless it be mingled not only with faith and prayer, as the swallow's nest is constructed of bits of straw to give the clay strength and coherence, but also, like the swallow's nest, with a part of ourselves, with the love, and the sympathy, and the self-denial of our souls. The instinctive, unconscious love of the swallow for its prospective young is shown by the sacrifice of itself in the building of its home ; and our love for the little children, to use the apostle's words, of whom we travail in birth again until Christ be formed in them, should be shown by a similar self-sacrifice, only conscious and willing, and greater in degree as the object is so much more important.

A NEST IN A HEATHER BUSH.

ONE day in June I found a dainty nest,
So cunningly hid in a heather bush
That fringed a way-side rock, no human eye
Would e'er have seen the secret hidden there,
Had not the bird betrayed it, flying out.
'Twixt nest and bush a subtle harmony
Revealed itself, suggesting precious thoughts.
The nest grew to its round completeness, formed
By skill unconscious, as the heather sprays
Grew naturally around its mossy sides,
Keeping the bright eye of the laughing day
From peering in with glance too curious.
And when the crimson bloom burst through the leaves
Seven tiny eggs, blue as a summer wave,
Blushed 'neath the warm reflection which it cast.
Love built the nest,—love shaped the heather-bloom ;
And both are tender products of the same
Mysterious heart that throbs in Nature's breast.
The nest is but a flower-cup, in whose depth
The bird-life blossoms ; and the heather-flower
Is but a brighter-hued and tenderer nest,
In which the plant expends its richest grace.
The mate's sweet song upon the neighbouring tree,
The brightened feathers on its bosom soft,
The deftly-woven nest and gem-like eggs,
The mother's love that quickens them to life,
Are but the counter-parts in higher form.

Of hue, and shape, and fragrance, of the flower—
Both making up the marriage-feast of spring.
The heather-bells make silent music, which
The inner ear of soul alone can hear ;
The bird's sweet song expresses all the joy
Of young life budding from the old and sere—
The perfect harmony of means and ends
In God's great world, of kindred natures made.
Above the mystery of a higher life
Hid in its heart—the seed of future wings
And future song—the wayside heather-bush,
Burning with its own crimson fire of bloom,
Reveals the presence of the great “I Am,”
Who clothes the lilies—feeds the fowls of Heaven,
Associates Himself with all His works,
Dwells in the bush and in the human heart,
And gives expression full in various modes
To the same primal element of love ;
So that the passer-by, who looks within,
And understands the meaning of the sight,
Puts off his shoes in reverence, and feels
The place whereon he stands is holy ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE STAFF AND THE SACRIFICE.

"And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child ; but there was neither voice nor hearing. . . . And Elisha went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands ; and he stretched himself upon the child ; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro ; and went up, and stretched himself upon him : and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes."

2 KINGS iv. 31, 34, 35.

THE story of the Shunammite and her son is one of the most charming idylls in the Bible. It abounds in the most beautiful touches of nature ; and though the mould in which it is cast is peculiarly Eastern, its simple pathos appeals to the universal human heart. It is full of suggestive meanings, and contains lessons upon which a whole volume might be written. But passing from the simple, obvious instruction which the narrative bears upon the surface of it, I wish to use the significant incidents connected with the child's restoration as an acted parable. It is in this way that the miracles of the Old and New Testaments have a

permanent use and value. The supernatural element in them cannot be repeated, for, like all creative acts, it is unique ; but the moral element can be perpetuated, and we can proceed on the lines of action which the miracles have laid down, just as we can use what has been created, for our own purposes, though we cannot create. Looking at the incidents of the miracle of Shunem in this light, they seem to me to afford admirable illustrations of the two prevailing methods of doing good, both on a large scale, as affecting the highest interests of the whole human race ; and on a small scale, as affecting the spiritual and temporal interests of individuals. The one method of doing good, which may be called the *impersonal*, is illustrated by Gehazi putting the staff of the prophet upon the face of the dead child ; the other, or *personal* method, is illustrated by the prophet stretching himself upon the dead body, and by his own exertions and sacrifices restoring the life that had fled. Let me consider these two illustrations separately.

i. The *impersonal* method.—Although an inspired prophet, Elisha was a man subject to like passions with ourselves. He had to grow in grace, to increase in faith, and to grope through darkness for light, like any other person. He was not always inspired. There were times when he had to acquire his knowledge as we have to acquire ours, by painful experience, by slow degrees, and repeated failures and disappointments. In regard to this matter of the Shunammite's son, he himself confesses his ignorance. He says, “The Lord

hath hid it from me, and hath not told me." In sending Gehazi with his staff to lay it upon the dead child's face, he was therefore trying an experiment; he was doing not what the Lord had revealed to him, but what he himself imagined was the best thing to do in the circumstances. He transferred the mantle of Elijah from himself to Gehazi in perfect faith. He expected that some good might be done, if the grand miracle of restoration could not be accomplished. The circumstances brooked no delay. The child was dead; and in that hot Eastern clime, burial speedily followed upon death, for the work of decay began almost as soon as the breath left the body. If therefore the dreadful process of dissolution was to be prevented, and the corpse was to be restored, while the echoes of life were still ringing as it were about its central parts, no time was to be lost. The prophet himself could not go; he could not leave the poor mother in her anguish; he must try and do something to comfort her while she is clinging to his feet and imploring his sympathy and aid. And therefore he sent his servant with his staff: that instrument of power which on former occasions God had honoured with success—which, like Moses' rod, had wrought wonderful miracles; hoping that if it could not restore life, it might at least avert decomposition, and preserve the body in that exquisite marble beauty which in little children is so like an angel's sleep. He did what he could at the time; but it was not sufficient. His action was impersonal; it was wrought by another, by a mere servant; it did not

proceed from a true knowledge of the case, and it did not contain the requisite amount of faith. For these reasons it did not succeed. Death would not release his prey at the bidding of such a feeble and inadequate instrumentality. Elisha himself did not manifest any surprise when Gehazi returned from his fruitless errand, and told him, saying, "The child is not awaked." Having adopted the measure as a human precaution, and not at the instigation of God's Spirit, he could not count upon success; and therefore there was no revulsion of feeling, no shock to his faith. He knew by the result that he had committed an error in judgment, that he had adopted the wrong expedient; and upon its failure he was prepared to try the personal method, by going himself to the scene of death, and doing what he could himself to raise the dead to life.

It will be lawful, in the first place, to apply this incident to the mode of salvation that existed in the time of Elisha—the method of imparting life to the dead body of humanity by the dispensations previous to the Gospel. These modes were all impersonal. God Himself did not come into closest contact with men, did not identify Himself with their interests, did not assume their nature or tabernacle with them. As Elisha sent his servant to restore the dead child, so He sent His prophets and priests and godly men, and spoke to mankind at sundry times and in divers manners. He sent His servants with His commission, and gave them His staff, the rod of His power. He entered into covenant with Israel, and gave them laws and institu-

tions for their guidance and blessing. But the result of all His impersonal dealings with the human race before the appearance of the Saviour, was like the result of Gehazi's laying the prophet's staff upon the face of the dead child. Some good indeed was done. The decay of religion was prevented ; the process of spiritual decomposition was arrested ; the possibilities of restoration were conserved ; and the body of humanity was kept at least from sinking into a deeper spiritual death, and yielding to the dissolving forces which were assailing it in the world. But no spiritual life was enkindled ; the sleep of death was not broken ; mankind, dead in trespasses and sins, heard no voice, and felt no touch potent enough to break the spell that bound it down in spiritual torpor and coldness. Scripture itself tells us of the insufficiency of all the means and appliances that were used under the old dispensations to quicken mankind into newness of life. It tells us that "the law made nothing perfect" ; that it could not effect the restoration which it proclaimed "in that it was weak through the flesh" ; that it had only "a shadow of good things to come." The whole Bible declares the truth that the law—not the ceremonial law, which was done away with by the coming of the Gospel, but the eternal and unchangeable rule of righteousness, which is the transcript of the Divine nature and the harmony of the universe—was unable, notwithstanding its awful threatenings and glorious rewards, to cope with human corruption, and remedy the evils of sin. Even when

it had been brought home with enlightening efficacy and convincing power to the heart and conscience, its effect was often only to stimulate dormant evil longings and latent corrupt affections into virulent action. Its prohibitions and restraints, so far from killing sinful desire, had a tendency to increase it; sin took "occasion by the commandment," and that which "was ordained to life," proved "to be unto death."

St. Paul records his own experience of its futility: "I had not known sin," he says, "but by the law. For I was alive without the law once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Its rewards were abstractions which, however beautiful and alluring in description and prospect, were nevertheless powerless to counteract the present temptations that came to human beings in warm, living, breathing shapes of flesh and blood. The law may induce a man actually to refuse the offers and allurements of evil, but it cannot grapple with the sin of the heart, and order aright the government of that invisible kingdom within where Satan wages his most successful war. Its terrors and its blessings have no effect in that inner world where we have to do, not with the realities, but with the ideal forms of sin—where there are none of the restraints and mitigations that hinder the full power of evil in the world without; where ambition is uniformly successful, and pleasure leaves no stains or stings behind; and vice, instead of being clothed in rags and fed on the beggar's dole, is clothed in purple and fares sumptuously every day. "If," says the Apostle, "there

had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law." But such is the inherent corruption of human nature, that no law, however holy or however sanctioned, could reach and cure the disease. The laying of it as a standard of righteousness before a soul dead in trespasses and sins, is as useless as was the laying of the prophet's staff on the dead child's face. It only shows the deadness of the soul all the more.

And if this be the case with the great impersonal method for the salvation of the whole race and of the whole of human nature from all the evil effects of sin, we find that it is very strikingly the case with every individual attempt to overcome the individual evils of sin in particular persons. Much of the exercise of benevolence in these days is impersonal. As our agricultural occupations are now carried on by the aid of machinery; as our fields are sown and reaped, not by manual labour coming into close contact with the seed in the sowing and with the stalks of ripe corn in the reaping, but by means of implements that remove the human agency to a greater distance from the objects that are acted upon; so much of our spiritual sowing and reaping is also done by means of formal organizations—committees, associations, and societies, with limited liability. Many try to do good by means of others. They bribe substitutes to undertake the duty which rests upon every human being to relieve personally the brother whom he sees in want, and by paying an occasional fine in money or money's worth,

they seek exemption from being their distressed brother's keeper, and freedom to carry on their own selfish business or pleasure unmolested. They send their servant, as the prophet sent Gehazi, to heal some clamant evil by the aid of their staff ; by the help of something that is useful to them, but not indispensable ; something that belongs to them, but is not a part of themselves ; something that they can spare without inconvenience. The staff that they use represents their money, their help, whatever shape it assumes ; and their Gehazi is the missionary or minister, the society or collector, whom they use in distributing their help. Thus they themselves never come into contact with the evil they seek to redress ; they never see the objects of their charity ; they have no personal interest in them, no sympathy of heart and soul with them as brothers and sisters sharing the same human nature. And acting in this impersonal way, having our good deeds done for us by proxies and substitutes ; subjecting ourselves to no real sacrifice, no pain or trouble or inconvenience ; sending our alms by the hands of a servant who may turn out to be as covetous, hard and careless of the interests of those for whom he acts and to whom he administers help as Gehazi ; doing the work only for the sake of the reputation, or the substantial loaves and fishes connected with it—we need not wonder that so many of our efforts to remove the evil of the world should be so unsuccessful. Its dead, cold form remains pulseless and motionless under the pitying heavens. There is no answering thrill of life, no voice to break the awful stillness. Instead of mak-

ing the miserable better, we have made them more ungrateful and improvident, and we have made ourselves callous, world-bound, and deeper sunk than ever in the very barbarism of our prosperity. In spite of the multitudes of our societies and our innumerable efforts, the dead body of the misery that is in the world is as cold and impassive as ever ; and we are ready to despair of its ever being raised to life at all, and can think of nothing better than to let it slowly disappear, by its own corruption and disintegration, off the face of the earth.

2. But there is a more excellent way—the *personal* method of doing good, as illustrated by Elisha stretching himself upon the dead body of the child. When the prophet learned the failure of Gehazi's application of his staff to the corpse, he went himself to the upper chamber where the child was laid out stiff and cold on his own bed ; and there, along with fervent prayer to God, repeatedly and pressingly presented, he used the most elaborate means to restore the life that had fled. He stretched himself upon the dead child ; each part of his own body being laid upon the corresponding part of the body of the child. He put his mouth upon his mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands. In this way he did all he could to revive the pulses and restore the functions which had been frozen into immobility by death. He strove to impart his own vital caloric, and so make the body plastic for the use of the spirit when it should come back—“to heat the iron upon which the hammer of the Almighty was about to strike.”

He himself lost the virtue which he thus communicated to the system of the child ; for we find that, chilled by contact with the cold corpse, he rose from the bed and walked to and fro in the room, as if to recover by exercise the warmth that had passed from him. And thus putting himself as far as possible in the room of the dead, taking all the evil to himself, feeling the sorrow of the bereaved mother as though it were his own sorrow, by God's power and grace he succeeded in gradually bringing the child to life, and had the infinite happiness of restoring him to his rejoicing mother. And how significant is all this of the Divine method of restoring the dead body of humanity through the life and death of Christ. Does not the stretching of the prophet upon the dead child—each member of his own body being applied to the corresponding member of the lifeless corpse, and by this sympathetic contact imparting his own vitality to it, and ultimately raising it to life—figure forth in the most beautiful and suggestive manner the incarnation of God, by which He brought His infinitude within the limitations of human nature and human existence, touching it at every sympathetic point, and so raised it from a death in sin to newness of life in Himself? What does each joyful Christmas morning proclaim? Is it not the wonderful fact that the Eternal God incarnated Himself in the body of a little child ; was born in Bethlehem, lay as a helpless babe on a mother's breast, grew in wisdom as in stature, and lived in humble dependence upon and submission to earthly parents in a human home in Nazareth? Does it not tell

us that God in Christ was united to us by blood-relation-ship ; knew all “the things of a man” ; filled all the moulds of our conduct, and passed along all the lines of our experience ? Does it not powerfully proclaim to us the one only method of salvation, to which all other methods, by their weakness and failure, pointed, and for which all other methods prepared the way—the personal method of God assuming the very nature that had sinned and suffered, and in that nature bringing back life and holiness and happiness and all that man had lost ? Yes ! we deeply feel that what no authority human or divine, no terrors or promises or entreaties could do, has been done by the Son of God Himself becoming from the beginning and altogether a man ; and thus claiming human nature in its entirety for sonship with God—drawing near to us that we might be enabled to draw near to the Father in heaven. “What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh ; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”

And consider the awful cost of this personal method of salvation. It was with much toil and trouble that Elisha raised the dead child to life. That act involved a great expenditure of heart-sympathy,—of spiritual power and of physical warmth. It was through loss to himself that he imparted gain to the mother and child. But his effort and trouble and loss cannot be compared for a moment with those of the Saviour in rescuing us

from spiritual death. Elisha, though he stretched himself upon the dead body, and put all his members into closest connection with all the corresponding members of the dead body, was still separate from the child. The connection between them was only an outward one. But Jesus became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. In the first creation God stood aloof at an immeasurable altitude above the creation when He summoned it into existence. But in the new creation He identified Himself with the work of His hands. He assumed the nature which He had made ; He dwelt in the world which He had fashioned ; He came under the laws and limitations which He had ordained. He Himself shared the lot to which He condemned us ; He Himself groaned under the burden which He laid upon us ; He Himself trod the wilderness to which He banished us. He became “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” ; afflicted in all our afflictions. It was by fasting and prayer that He cast out devils ; it was with groaning and tears that He raised the dead. He suffered loss that others might reap gain. He came into contact with sin and impurity that others might be cleansed and healed. In the miracle which most nearly approximated a creative act—the restoring the vision of the man blind from his birth—He used not only the dust of the earth out of which the eye and the whole human frame were originally formed, but also His own saliva—a part of Himself ; He gave away a portion of His own substance in the clay with which He anointed the blind man’s eyes. And this act is significant of the whole of His work,

and of every detail of it—which in its self-sacrifice and self-expenditure anticipated and prefigured the final crowning act of oblation upon the Cross. Contrast the first creative fiat, “Let there be light: and there was light,” with the last cry of our Lord as He was sinking out of life, in the horror of a darkness unexampled in the history of the universe: “My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?” and you will form some idea of what the new creation cost the Son of God!

The same remarks that are applicable to the great salvation of Jesus Christ, are applicable to every individual effort we make in the track and in the power of that salvation to redress the evil of the world. Among the many great lessons which the incarnation of the Son of God is designed to teach us, this lesson is assuredly not the least important—that if it was necessary for Christ to take human nature upon Himself in order to redeem it, so it is necessary for us to become incarnate as it were in the nature we wish to benefit. The servant, in this respect, cannot be greater than his Lord. We too must take upon us the nature of the sufferer whom we try to heal and save. We must, like Elisha, take the evil that we would remove to our own room; we must lay it upon our own bed; we must bear it upon our own heart; we must identify ourselves with it as far as we possibly can. We must stretch our own living body upon the dead body that we would seek to raise to life and blessedness; we must put our whole nature into contact and communion with its whole nature. Each part of us must be brought by a thorough sym-

pathy into the fellowship of love with each corresponding part of the body of suffering and evil. Like a Greater than Elisha, we must touch the bier with the true human touch of fellow-feeling, if we would turn the shadow of death into the morning. We must touch the leper, if we would purify and restore him. We must become poor ourselves ; part with our possessions ; give what we shall miss, what will cost us much self-denial and self-sacrifice ; give our very substance—our vital warmth, our tears, our heart's blood—if we are to make others rich and happy. Virtue must go out of ourselves, if we are to impart virtue to others.

There is a wide perennial moral in that old worn-out classic story of Curtius. Into the gulf that opened suddenly in the Roman Forum the citizens poured all their richest possessions—their gold and silver and jewels ; but the dark gulf yawned before them as wide and terrible as ever. It was not till one of Rome's noblest youths threw himself into it, that the abyss closed for ever and the place became solid ground. And so in vain with our alms and gifts of gold and silver, of food and medicine, with the labours of our societies and committees, shall we seek to fill up the dreadful gulf of the world's misery and sin. Not till we give ourselves after the manner of our Lord shall the abyss be closed. What the world needs more than anything else—more than theories and plans of benevolence ; more than gifts of money, laws, speeches, sermons, organizations, and the thousand and one panaceas which men in their despair of solving the dreadful problem have adopted for

the cure of the world's evil—is the revival of personal agency ; the touch of hearts sore with pity, the look of eyes full of tears, the voice quivering with the pathos of tenderness and hope ; the humble, loving, devoted Christian life, in which the teaching of the Master is embodied in a living, breathing human form. This would succeed when all other methods would fail.

Let us never lose sight, then, of the great truth that, in the husbandry of souls, it is necessary that the sower, alone,—solitary, individual—should scatter the seed with his own hand, and the reaper gather each ripe stalk separately into his sheaf as he cuts it down. In the blessed labours of the Cross, it is required that there should be a real crucifixion with Christ ; that His servants should even “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ for His body's sake, which is the Church.” Every Christian who has himself been saved by the coming of Jesus into his own nature and taking upon Him his sins and sorrows, should imitate Christ in this—should seek to save others who are still dead in “trespasses and sins” by bearing, through sympathy and solicitude for their welfare, their sins and sorrows. Every Christian should endeavour, by personal contact with the evil of the world, to remedy it by the influence of personal faith and living love. Every Christian, who is a debtor to all men, should go home with the poor, and the ignorant, and the miserable, and make their trials his own, that thus he may truly relieve and bless them. In the first creation God acted alone ; but in the new

creation He needs human help, human faith, and human suffering. He is giving to each human being the opportunity and the honour of being a fellow-worker with Himself; and enabling all who engage in this blessed work to know, by their own experience, something of the yearning compassion for men which caused Himself to take the form of a servant, and to become "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"; and something, too, of the joy in the salvation of men that was set before Himself,—for which He "endured the cross, despising the shame"; the earnest and foretaste of the everlasting rest and blessedness which they shall share with Him when the work of redemption is completed.

CHAPTER IX.

THE VERONICA.

"The face of Jesus Christ."—*2 CORINTHIANS* iv. 6.

A MONG the fringes of grass along the white dusty waysides may often be seen, in the beginning of summer, the little spikes of the germander speedwell. The blue of its flowers harmonizes with the green of its own foliage and the lush herbage of the bank in a way that nature alone could effect. And what a blue it is; clear, deep, transparent, like that of an Eastern sky suffused with moonlight, cold and brilliant, and yet soft like the lambent azure depth of a glacier crevasse! A little circle of white forms the centre, beautifully relieves the blue, and gives to the eye of the blossom a wondrous expressiveness. Slender lines of darker hue radiate from it to the edge; one petal, that along which the pistil lies, being narrower and smaller than the other three, and, unlike them, destitute of lines; while two stamens, like the antennæ of an insect, project from the eye and remain attached to the corolla, which falls off entire, almost with a touch,

as if a small blue butterfly had alighted for a moment on the spike, and had been scared away. It is an exceedingly shy flower, and lasts but a very short time; its heavenly colour, like that of the sky from which it has got it, changing in the most disappointing manner, so that a cluster of the loveliest blossoms looking out upon us to-day from among the tall spears of the grass, may to-morrow be dim, grey, or cloudy, all their sparkle and brightness gone; as if the dew that nourished them had been tears, and the light that called forth their beauty had also the power to fade it. And the magic tint, which in a happy moment we surprised, never reappears in the after-flowers. Or else the corolla drops from the stalk, leaving an empty socket where a little eye of blue had laughed back to heaven. A succession of blossoms and fruit may be seen on the same spike: and the seed-vessels, wedged in the axils of the long leaves of the persistent calyx, are like those of the shepherd's purse,—containing in them a small portion of summer's precious wealth, waiting for the revelation of next season.

This little speedwell, whose "darling blue" Tennyson and a host of other poets have noticed with peculiar delight, is known by the more learned name of Veronica. It belongs to a large and varied family of plants which are either shrubby or herbaceous, and whose flowers grow on spikes. Blue is the predominating colour of their blossoms; and they have received their generic name of *vera icon*, or true image, because they seem to mirror exactly in their delicate hue the

deep azure colour of the sky above. It is an interesting example of the ancient doctrine of plant signatures, according to which the pious ideas of our forefathers were recorded in the popular names of flowers. The cowslip, for instance, was dedicated to St. Peter, and used to be called Herb Peter, from the resemblance of its hanging tuft of blossoms to a bunch of keys; the common pansy was called Herb Trinity, on account of its having three colours on one flower; and the Hypericum or St. John's wort, which was gathered to scare away demons on St. John's Eve, derived its name, being made up of *uper*, over, and *icon*, an image, from the halo of golden stamens which surrounds the petals, like the nimbus of glory around the sacred icon or image of our Lord.

With the Latin name of the speedwell a beautiful legend is connected. We can trace the gradual growth of it, according to the usual laws which regulate the development of a myth, from the well-known fable of the message of Abgarus, King of Edessa, to Christ. This prince, worn out by a dreadful disease, and hearing of the wonderful miracles which Jesus did, sent a special messenger, entreating Him to come and cure him. Various accounts are given of the way in which Jesus dealt with this messenger. One states that He sent an autograph letter; another adds that with the letter was forwarded a miraculous portrait of Himself, taken by simply pressing a part of His mantle or a piece of linen to His face, which ever afterwards retained the sacred lineaments. A third account says

that the servant of Abgarus, called Ananias, who was a painter, was commissioned to bring back the likeness of our Lord to his master, if he failed to bring Him in person; and that our Lord, seeing the vain attempts which he made to accomplish his task, owing to the dense crowd that surrounded him, washed His face in water, and whilst drying it with a towel, left the impress of His features upon it. This relic the servant was commanded to give to the king, whose disease it would cure at the same time that it would satisfy his curiosity. At the siege of Edessa the sacred icon was brought to Constantinople and placed in a suitable shrine in the Church of St. Sophia. Its subsequent history, when Constantinople fell into the hands of the Mahometans, is involved in obscurity. Either the picture itself or copies of it were found in different parts of Italy about this time—the Genoese asserting that it was brought to their city in 1384 by Montalto, and by him was presented to the Armenian Church of St. Bartholomew, where it is still preserved and exhibited once a year; while the Venetians, on the other hand, claim to have brought it to Rome, and to have presented it to the Church of St. Sylvester there.

At this point the legend diverges and assumes a different form. It leaves the Eastern Church, in which it originated, and is taken up by the Western Church, which thereupon forges the story of St. Veronica in its desire to possess a relic of equal importance with that which belonged to the rival Church. When Jesus was on His way to Calvary to be crucified, a woman, whose

name was Prounikos or Bernice, afterwards Latinized into Veronica, supposed to be no other than the woman with the issue of blood whom Jesus healed, deeply compassionating His sufferings, and in gratitude for her own wonderful cure, gave Him her veil, that He might with it wipe away from His face the sweat caused by the heavy burden of the cross, and the blood oozing from the wounds inflicted by the crown of thorns. Our Saviour returned the veil to her when it had done its work of mercy, with His sacred features indelibly impressed upon it. With this miraculous portrait the holy woman went to Rome, where she met with St. Clement. The Emperor Vespasian at this time was seriously ill, and St. Clement accompanied her to the palace, when the sacred icon at once restored him to health. The Roman Catholic Church has introduced this legend of St. Veronica into the office of the Via Dolorosa. Several miraculous veils or veronicas exist in Christendom at the present day ; one is at Jaen in Andalusia, another at Laon, a third at Cologne, and a fourth at Milan. But the most celebrated are the two Roman ones in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in St. Peter's and in the Church of St. Sylvester, and the one preserved in the Church of St. Bartholomew at Genoa. The late Mr. Thomas Heapy, who devoted a lifetime to the subject, in his magnificent monograph, "The Likenesses of Christ : being an enquiry into the verisimilitude of the received likeness of our Blessed Lord," gives what the English public had never seen before—representations of these three veronicas.

The first and most important, the “Volto Santo,” as it is called, is contained in a shrine hollowed out of one of the huge piers which support the dome of St. Peter’s, with a balcony in front of it, and a statue of St. Veronica holding the miraculous veil or *sudarium* immediately below in a niche. No one who has not the rank of a canon of the Church is allowed to see this relic; and when foreign sovereigns and princes are admitted to examine it, they have the rank conferred upon them as an honorary distinction for the purpose. Ten times a year it is exhibited to the pope, the cardinals, and the other dignitaries of the Church, who kneel on the pavement of the nave in front of it. To the general public it is shown on Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Day, from the balcony, and seven thousand years of indulgence are promised to all who witness the sight. But the height is so great that nothing but a black board hung with a cloth, before which another featureless cloth is held, can be distinguished. So-called facsimiles on linen of the sacred face are sold to strangers in the sacristy of St. Peter’s; but though they are sealed with the seal and bear the signature of one of the canons of the Church, who are the custodiers of the relic, this is no guarantee that the copy at all resembles the original. M. Barbier de Montault, Canon of Anagni, who saw the veronica on the occasion of the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, describes it as a dark, dim picture, covered with a thin plate of glass, and enclosed in a simple square frame of silver. He could not dis-

tinguish the nature of the material upon which the portrait was impressed ; and all he could see on the blackish surface was a vague outline of flowing hair reaching to the shoulders, and a short bifurcated beard, but no other evidence of human features. Mr. Heapy, however, who could hardly as a Protestant have seen the original, gives a beautiful representation of the picture in his book, which is so distinct, so noble and full of feeling that, as the author says, he who produced it must have actually seen what he depicted. Whatever we may think of this discrepancy, however, there can be no doubt that the portrait is a very ancient one. It is said to have been originally preserved in a box in the Church of St. Mary of the Martyrs, more commonly known as the Pantheon. It was placed in the Vatican by John VII. in 707, and afterwards transferred to the Church of Santo Spirito, from which it was taken to its present position in St. Peter's in 1440. Hemans thinks it is a work of Byzantine art of the seventh or eighth century. It is possible, however, that it may be considerably older ; for if Mr. Heapy's picture at all resembles the original, it is entirely unlike the work of the Byzantine school, and approximates to that of the classical. The likeness is the traditional one with which we are all familiar in pictures and engravings ; the oval face, the smooth lofty brow, arched eyebrows, hair parted and flowing in curls to the shoulders, straight nose, beard short, scanty, and bifurcated, the expression grave and mild, and the whole appearance that of a man of from thirty to forty years of age.

This generally accepted type of countenance attributed to the Saviour was not arbitrarily invented. When so many independent persons, both in the East and the West, portrayed the sacred lineaments in a way so remarkably similar, and according to a type entirely different from the classical ideal, it is difficult not to believe that they had a common traditional guide before them. And when we bear in mind that some of the portraits go as far back as the earliest centuries of our era, the conviction almost forces itself upon our minds that this common traditional type of countenance must have been derived directly from the description of those who had beheld the Saviour's living countenance. Although no mention is made in Scripture of our Lord's personal appearance, and no hint given by which any true conception of it could be formed, we cannot suppose that it was allowed to fade away utterly from human memory when the cloud received Him out of the sight of the disciples. His own generation would describe it to the next, and that again to the following, until the tradition had become the fixed heritage of the Church; and believers in the following ages were able to form a reverent idea, approaching the reality, of the bodily features of Him, whom having not seen they loved.

Such is the origin and history of the Veronica myth of the Roman Catholic Church. It was a beautiful superstition which transferred it to a common wild flower. Why that wild flower should have been selected for this honour in preference to other more

striking plants it is difficult to tell. Its blossom is not more like a human countenance than any other blossom. It is not like the flowers of the orchis family, which mimic so strangely the peculiarities of insect and other animal life. It is only by a poetical analogy that the eye can see in it any human resemblance. Perhaps its colour may be the secret of its fascination, for blue is peculiarly the colour of heaven—of its serenity and love. It is the colour of the sea out of which all life comes, and of the air in which all things live and move and have their being. It is the colour of the eye that sees the beauty of the world, and of the robe of the ephod worn by the high priest ordained to make the unconscious beauty of things the conscious beauty of holiness before the Lord. And no one can gaze upon the large fragile blossom of the Alpine veronica—so exquisitely constructed, so delicately tinted, reflecting the deepest blue of the overarching summer sky and of the profoundest depth of the glacier-crevasse, almost on whose brink it trembles—without being struck with the suitableness of its name. It came to me like a sudden revelation when I found a large shivering cluster of it growing in the roar and spray of a mighty waterfall in the heart of Norway. Even the little species that grows as a troublesome weed in our fields and gardens is not undeserving of its august name. Its blossom is very diminutive, its blue is pale and washed out, and on the odd petal disappears altogether in whiteness; but it retains enough of the family likeness to make it easily recognized.

And perhaps its smaller size and its quieter and more hidden beauty may all the more appropriately associate it with Him who, Himself meek and lowly, and having no form or comeliness, had for this reason a peculiar love for what others despised—for the little and humble objects of nature and of human life.

The instinct which led pious souls to canonize the veronica was deeper and truer than they themselves knew. Our reason scornfully rejects the fable of the Saviour's features stamping themselves ineffaceably upon a linen veil or handkerchief; but our imagination joyfully accepts the idea, that in the modest blossom of a little wayside flower, the Face that was fairer than that of the sons of men is seen reflected anew every summer. The veronica of the Church is a palpable falsehood, fabricated for purposes of superstition or gain; and thus degrading the nature and function of the Church, which should be the pillar and ground of truth, and a sure incorruptible witness against all the falsehoods of the world. Instead of holding the mirror up to nature, it throws an additional veil over nature's already dark intimations. The veronica of the fields, on the contrary, is a faithful and true representative of Him who dwelt in the bush, and without whom was not anything made that was made. Its pure open face is the very image of innocence; it is a creature indeed in which there is no guile. It has caught the blue of its petals from a steadfast gazing into the candid heavens, and the white radiance of its eye from the immaculate snow of the summer clouds. The lineaments of the sudarium

are said to have been imprinted by means of the sweat and blood of the Prince of sufferers upon a material that speaks of the nakedness of the curse and the toil in the sweat of the face to which sin condemned man, and is itself the product of toil. The face of the flower veronica has developed without labour or sorrow; it has never sinned, it cannot sin, but perfectly fulfils God's purpose in its creation. There is no crown of thorns on its brow, no sweat of labour on its calm, unruffled face, no blood of anguish coursing through its veins, but a green sap, the very milk of the grass, and the leaves, the showers, and the sunbeams, and all the sweet and tender things of the summer world. It toils not, neither does it spin; it is wrought in a loom not made with hands; it has no other reason for its existence than its beauty, and in its beautiful idleness is fulfilling the highest ends of existence. The likeness that we discern in the countenance of the veronica is not that of Him who was weary and heavy laden and found no rest under the awful burden of Calvary; but the image of Him who walked with our first parents among the trees of the garden in the purity and bliss of the unfallen Eden. It has the clear, open, fearless eye of the young child that knows no sin or care, and has no self-consciousness of an anxious restless life different from that of the birds and the flowers. And to those who gaze upon its innocent beauty with eyes that tears have dimmed, it seems like a little glimpse of the fathomless blue of heaven that opens up amid the dark clouds that usually cover the sky of the world.

What the blossom is to the rest of the plant, the face of man is to his body and his whole being. Human life flowers in the human face. It brings the whole man to the surface; and as the mirror of the inward man, it reflects every subtle shade of thought and every varying light of feeling. It is moulded from within according to the likeness of the mind and heart which it envelops. The matter of the universe in it bears the soul's expression. God re-creates the world in the face of man. In it alone He fully accomplishes His divine idea. The loveliness of nature becomes in it conscious of itself. The light of the sun is transfigured in its eye into the light of intelligence; the crimson of the rose passes on its cheek into the bloom and blush of love; the murmur of the stream and the sigh of the wind are transformed upon its lips into music and eloquence. It implies society; for were man destined to live alone his countenance would not have been formed as it is to exhibit upon it every thought and emotion that animate him, which, in spite of the most careful drilling of the features, reveal themselves to others by unmistakable signs. Think how it would be with us if we had only the presence of our friends without their faces. There could be no intercourse of love, no meeting of heart with heart, no sharpening by the countenance of a friend as iron sharpeneth iron. Life would be a dark, dreary void, like the earth without the sun.

In like manner the blossom is the face of the plant, in which all that is in its life appears to view, and the beauty hidden in the dark cloud of its foliage breaks

out into rainbow splendour. It is a revelation as through an open door of the loveliness that in the other parts is concealed by the common garments of economic use. The plant clings to the skirts of life with the utmost tenacity until it can show this beautiful reason for its existence ; and when it has told in bloom of petal and fragrance of honey-cup the precious life-secret, it is content to die, like the dolphin, in its own sunset hues. It is in the flower-face that we recognize the kinship of the flowers—their relationship to each other, and the differences that distinguish them. It is in the flower-face that the plant aspires to the human nature, breathes as man breathes, sleeps as he sleeps, and up to its own straightened limits loves as he loves ; for the gay colours and sweet odours and graceful forms of the blossom are literally the signs of the deep inbreathing spirit of love in nature, the preparations for the bridal hour in the plant. The flower-face too, like the human, is thus seen to be made for the social life ; for the leaf belongs to the individual, and the blossom to the race. And just as Stephen's face looked like the face of an angel when he was dying the martyr's death, and Jesus was transfigured when He spoke of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, and the skin of Moses' countenance shone when he sacrificed himself for the good of Israel on the Mount ; as sometimes, in rare moments of the soul's supremacy, we see our friends lifted up by some noble act of self-denial above themselves, putting on the heavenly face that shall be theirs

hereafter, and we behold them as they shall look when this mortal shall have put on immortality ; so the blossom is so radiant and graceful, full of all sweetness and light—wears the angel face—because in it the life of the individual is sacrificed for the life of the race. Hegel in his “Philosophy of History” has taken notice of the peculiar, almost unearthly beauty, unlike the complexion of mere health and vital vigour, seen in the faces of women when their sorrow has passed into the joy that a man is born into the world—a refined and most delicate and transparent beauty, breathed as it were from the soul within. Such an exquisite bloom of beauty does the plant assume in the flower-face, as the seed is born of it which is to perpetuate the species and to grow and blossom in its turn into self-sacrificing loveliness. What would our springs and summers be without their flower-faces ? And yet for ages untold a flowerless earth turned its sombre face up to the sun. It had not learned to smile or laugh or blush in those dim far-off fern-ages before the flowers came to light up the gloom.

Every flower-face, properly speaking, may be called a veronica. It is a likeness of Him who is not only the true vine, but also the true daisy, the true rose, the true lily. He is the ideal of which each flower is the partial and transient representation ; the Substance that casts this dim shadow of itself in the fields ; the Light that is refracted into this beautiful radiance by the materials of earth. For, just as the instances which He gives of the resemblance between the kingdom of heaven and

various objects of nature and arts of human life were not meant to be exhaustive and exclusive, but comprehensive and representative, showing that the kingdom of heaven is like everything that God has made and instituted in the natural and human worlds ; so we may, by parity of reasoning, believe that the sayings, “I am the true bread,” “the true light,” “the true vine,” are similarly comprehensive and representative, and that Jesus is in reality, in the highest and completest form, what all the flowers of the field are in appearance and in subordinate and shadowy representation. Every flower-face with its limited capacities expresses some thought or quality or feature of Him who, while He is the image of the invisible God, is also the first-born of every creature, for He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. The human nature in which He became incarnate is a nature that up to a certain limit is shared by the lilies which He bade us consider as most significant interpreters of the mysteries of our own life. The face of the blossom anticipates the face of man ; it is an intimation and prefiguration of what in the human countenance is realized and fulfilled ; while that human countenance itself is the image of the Deity, and the sufficient medium prepared for the visible manifestation of the Father to the world. And while we gaze upon the lowly Shechinah blossoming at our feet, a cloud from heaven overshadows us, and a voice proclaims, “This is my beloved Son” ; and we realize that God has now made known to us the mystery of His will, that in the dispensation of the

fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both those which are in the heavens and those which are in the earth, even in Him.

We see God's back parts in the works of His hands. The lilies of the field and the stars of heaven reveal to us His working and power. We see His form walking on the waters and producing a great calm, gilding the mountain tops with the cloud of glory at morn, and at sunset burning in the bush of the desert and in the trees of the wood. But all that we see of God in nature and providence is a vague vast presence, a shadow projected by His form. It is only in Christ Jesus, who is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person, that we see the countenance of God and truly learn what His thoughts and feelings towards us and towards His creation are. We needed the revelation of the face to expound the revelation of the works. The living lips of Jesus gave utterance to what the flowers since their creation had been unable to impart; and the loving face of Jesus bending over the pure flower-faces beamed with the intelligence which they could not convey, and reflected in meaning looks and significant play of thought and feeling what the lights and shadows that passed over the kindling and the fading of their beauty implied. And as He thus gave expression by look and word to the helpless dumbness of the flowers, so by a beautiful reciprocity of service they lend their faces to interpret Him, and all their beauties to be His signs and witnesses. And so it comes to pass that

the little germander speedwell, which from the grassy fringe of the white dusty wayside touches the blue hem of His garment as He passeth by, catches from that magic touch the virtue of its lovely hue, like that of those serene azure depths into which the larks and our wishes go, and in its turn smiles upon the weary wayfarer with the simple holy greeting which has given it its name, and which is so suitable in a world of changes and chances like this—speed thee well! And the lovely veronica, in whose sweet innocent face we now see as through a glass darkly the dim, faint, anticipative lineaments of Him who is the crown of its loveliness, speaks to us mutely but eloquently of the beatific vision, when we, whom He truly made in His own image and after His own likeness, shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. “And they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads.”

CHAPTER X.

THE LOOKING-GLASS AND THE LAVER.

"And he made the laver of brass, and the foot of it of brass, of the looking-glasses of the women assembling, which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation."—EXODUS xxxviii. 8.

In providing materials for the construction of the tabernacle, the Israelites responded most nobly to the call of the Lord delivered to them by Moses. With the utmost cheerfulness and liberality they brought their free-will offerings every morning. Each person contributed whatever he possessed with a lavish hand and a generous heart. For a while they were lifted above the bondage of the law, and they acted in a princely manner as the true Israel—the princes of God. They felt that they were accomplishing a work which should be a witness for many generations to the God of Heaven, not only among themselves but also among the surrounding nations; and they were humbled and grateful that such as they were permitted to give for such a transcendent object. So great indeed was their zeal and munificence that they had actually to be

restrained from giving—for the stuff which they brought was more than sufficient for the purpose. Foremost among these princely givers were the women. As on a previous occasion they were most conspicuous in devoting their personal ornaments to the service of idolatry for the construction of the golden calf, so now they were the most large-hearted and open-handed in giving up their bracelets, ear-rings, rings, and jewels of gold for the construction of the tabernacle. These personal ornaments, which if worn by themselves would have enhanced their own charms, they gladly sacrificed for the adornment of the costly shrine in which the God of their fathers was to be worshipped in the beauty of holiness.

Even their much-valued mirrors were not withheld. Unlike our looking-glasses made of silvered glass, which did not come into use till the thirteenth century, these primitive looking-glasses were made chiefly of an alloy of copper, tin, and lead, wrought with such admirable skill that it was capable of receiving the highest and most enduring polish. The mirror itself was a round or pear-shaped plate, often encircled with a wreath of leaves, or adorned with figures engraved upon the rim; and it was attached to a handle often carved with some elegant form of life. Numerous *specchi* of this kind have been found in Etruscan tombs, retaining their polish so brightly as sometimes to fit them for their original purpose; and having on their disks scenes of Etruscan life and manners, and representations or symbols of the national faith, illustrated

by inscriptions in the native character, they have been well called by Bunsen "a figurative dictionary," eminently useful to the archæologist for the light they throw upon the creed and history of this ancient and most mysterious race. In Japan certain metal mirrors have acquired a magic fame, and are brought to this country as curiosities, on account of the figures which shine through them when seen in a certain light, while directly viewed they reflect only on their polished surface the face that looks into them.

The specula of the Hebrew women were brought with them from Egypt, and doubtless formed part of the spoil which the Israelites took from the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus. In that country they were used not only in domestic economy, but also in the idolatrous worship of the temples; and probably the Hebrew women who assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation had adopted this custom, and worshipped the God of Israel as the Egyptian women worshipped Isis or Anubis, dressed in linen garments, holding a sistrum in their right hand and a mirror in their left. With these bronze looking-glasses Bezaleel and Aholiab, the artists of the tabernacle, constructed the laver which stood at the door of the sacred tent, in which the priests were required to wash their hands and their feet when they went into the Shrine to minister before the Lord.

It is not without deep significance that this holy vessel, typical of spiritual cleansing, should have been formed of such materials. And if the looking-glasses

had previously been employed in the service of idolatry, the circumstance affords another striking example of the Divine economy which constructed the tabernacle itself and instituted its rites in large measure upon the models of the Egyptian religion ; which has always poured its higher truths into moulds with which men had been familiar before ; and has brought out of the false system the measure of truth which it contained, and which made it influential and suitable to human needs, setting its seal upon the truth and issuing it with a brighter image, a sharper outline and a more paramount authority from its own mint. The false *ancilia* of man's forging, reflected in some degree, if they did not distort, the true image of heaven. The things which the heathen saw in them were not optical illusions of the soul, but images of great and enduring realities. And by the adoption of these in the worship of the God of Israel, He emphatically showed that His religion, so far from having no relation with anything that went before, was the substance of the world's dream, the fulfilment of man's hope, the revelation of the transcendent wisdom which had been kept secret from the beginning of the world, after which in their blindness the nations were consciously or unconsciously groping. The mystic mirrors of the Egyptians which caught the dim unsatisfying likenesses of their gods many and lords many, which the Hebrew women used to better purpose and in a higher and holier service, were melted down and moulded into the bronze laver of the tabernacle, in whose waters the worshipper

should wash and be clean, and thus have the blessedness of the pure in heart and life, who should see the living and true God. These mirrors, in which the women of the Hebrew congregation saw their features passively reflected, were adapted to their noblest purpose when they became the active agent in producing a purity and comeliness in which the Divine Being should see the reflex of His own image. The whole transaction is a most beautiful and expressive symbol of the vast difference between the beauty which man sees in himself, and the beauty which God induces in him by the means of grace. In fact, the whole gospel scheme might be represented to the eye pictorially by these two emblematical objects—the looking-glass and the laver; for it shows us to ourselves, and it cleanses us from our impurity.

i. Let us look, in the first place, at the gospel as a mirror showing us to ourselves. Contemplating the features of our character in our own natural looking-glass, we are satisfied with the image that is reflected there. Comparing ourselves with ourselves we have no sense of contrast; we come up to our own ideal; we realize our own standard of goodness. Comparing ourselves with others we are raised in our own estimation; we see many guilty of meannesses and follies which we should scorn. We feel like the self-righteous Pharisee in the temple, and thank God that we are not as other men, or as the publican beside us. But the gospel is the true mirror in which we see our true image reflected. Even those who like the Hebrew women,

assemble at the door of the tabernacle, who are diligent in the performance of every religious duty, and have a pious reputation among their fellow men—when they gaze into this looking-glass have to confess that they are vile and polluted, and that their own righteousness is as filthy rags. In the courts of God's house the visions of their own comeliness which please them in human society are dispelled, and they learn lessons of a humbling but wholesome nature, and are conscious that He who looks at the heart cannot be deceived by the appearances which impose upon man. So was it with the godly men of old who in the truest sense assembled at the door of the tabernacle, and had communion with God face to face. Job had been considered and called a perfect man comparatively ; he stood the severe tests to which Satan had subjected him, and was proved to be true gold. But the revelation of heaven disclosed the dross that was mingled with it, and caused him to exclaim, “I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” A similar effect was produced upon the mind of Isaiah by the vision of God's holiness in the temple. He had previously denounced the iniquity of Israel, as if he himself had nothing to do with it, as one standing on a pedestal high above its polluting waves ; but now he realizes that he himself is personally and deeply implicated in it, and he cries out in great distress of soul, “Woe is me ! for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips, for

mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." When Daniel, the man greatly beloved, saw in a vision the ineffable glory of God, he exclaimed, " My comeliness is turned in me into corruption"; and the impulsive Peter, when the consciousness of the Divine presence like a lightning flash disclosed the dark depths of his nature to him, on the occasion of the miracle in the Sea of Galilee, said, " Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

And so is it still. The holiness of God, as it is revealed to us in the face of His Son Jesus Christ, is the best mirror in which to see reflected our own sinful image. That holiness is the part of the Divine image which we have completely lost in our fallen state. Every human being can form some conception, fainter or clearer, according to his own moral condition, of the other attributes of God—His justice, wisdom, power, goodness, mercy, love; because of these qualities there are still traces remaining in human nature, and even in their ashes live their former fires. But the image of God's holiness has completely vanished from human nature, and, therefore, we have no materials within ourselves, from which, according to the primeval law by which we make God in our own image, to construct the idea of holiness as ascribed to God. This power is the peculiar prerogative of the renewed mind, to which the Holy Spirit gives back the original image in which it was created. And the holiness of God thus realized is that which, more than anything else, convinces the soul of sin. When the pure search-

ing light of His law shines into our hearts, how defiled and unworthy do many things appear which before were regarded as clean and good ! What secret unsuspected sins are made manifest like the myriad motes which float in the sunbeams that enter a dark room ! How true it is, that those who are ignorant of God are ignorant of themselves ! They assume a sort of easy average morality, and form a very favourable judgment of themselves and others. But those who know God know themselves. Referring all things to Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, who cannot look upon sin, in whose sight the very heavens are not clean, their standard of judgment is raised to the very highest ; and judged by this lofty ideal, the best merely human character comes lamentably short.

So exquisitely sensitive is the speculum or metal mirror of a reflecting telescope that the slightest inequality in the supporting apparatus is fatal to its correct performance. The ponderous mirror of Lord Rosse's telescope is six feet in diameter and six inches thick, and weighs several tons ; and yet the mere pressure of the hand at the back of it produces flexure sufficient to destroy the image of a star. It is a work of the utmost difficulty and patience to produce its perfectly polished surface, and it is a work of equal delicacy so to place it that it may do its work of reflection efficiently. And so if the human soul is to mirror the beauty of holiness and the glory of heaven, it must be made and kept sensitive by the Holy Spirit. The least appearance of evil mars the Divine

image, and would be fatal to distinct vision of things eternal.

The gospel is a mirror that has shown to us human corruption most clearly and fully. There are, indeed, numerous intimations of this truth in the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms ; but the full disclosure of it was reserved for the Gospel ; just as there are intimations of a future life in the Old Testament, but it is in the New Testament only that life and immortality are clearly brought to light. The doctrine of the ruin of man belongs especially to the gospel. It is there fully brought to light for the first time. The law took cognizance only of outward violations of its rules, of the external manifestations of sin that appeared to the senses. It was only when sin blossomed and fruited, as it were, so that all men could see its true nature, that the law interfered. There might be malice to men and alienation from God in the heart ; but the law did not step in with its punishment till there was an outward breach of the second table or a patent lapse into idolatry ; just as there might be leprosy lurking in the blood and poisoning the very fountain of life, but the restraints of the law only came in when leprosy had unmistakably declared itself by outward marks on the face and hands. The Mosaic economy taught that contact with death and uncleanness would ceremonially defile an Israelite ; but it did not teach, except by implication, that the nature of the sinner was depraved—that out of the heart proceed the things that really pollute a man. And the reason of this is

obvious. If the law had declared the ruin of man, and at the same time had commanded men to obey its precepts, and so work out their own righteousness by their own efforts, it would have been as self-contradictory as the conduct of the physician who pronounced his patient incurable and at the same time prescribed to him a regimen meant to restore his health. In such a case the law would only bind the soul with firmer chains and tantalize it with streams that would dry up and fruits that would wither at its touch. The full disclosure of man's ruin, therefore, was only made when He was revealed who was to remove it by His obedience and death.

And so it is still in the experience of the Christian. The full revelation of sin comes with the revelation of Christ's atonement. The Spirit convinces of sin at the same time that He convinces of righteousness. Were the corruption of our nature revealed to us without the corresponding revelation of the righteousness of Christ justifying the ungodly who believe, the knowledge would drive us to despair. But no sooner is our sin shown to us than the Saviour, who can take away our sin, is made known to us. No sooner do we see our Saviour than we see our ruined, miserable condition. And all through the Christian life, while the heart learns to loathe itself, the Saviour becomes more precious; and as the Saviour becomes more precious, so does the sense of sin become more painful. The gospel is thus a mirror revealing to us our true character, the lowest depths of our sinfulness, be-

cause it reveals to us the mode of purification and deliverance.

It might seem unnecessary to say what is so simple and self-evident, that the contemplation of our own image in this divine looking-glass of itself can produce no moral change in us. And yet there are many professors of religion who imagine that by the mere confession of sin they are spiritually benefited, that by the mere cry of "Unclean, unclean" in their public and private devotions, they are magically cleansed from their spiritual leprosy. They look into the mirror of the gospel, and they see their own vile image reflected; and they suppose that gazing upon this image, and describing what they see is all that their religion demands of them. They have a sort of "acquiescent self-reproach," which reconciles the mind to the sinfulness it confesses and the corruption it laments, as if this were a stereotyped and normal state of things that could not be remedied. But this is obviously an abuse of the mirror. It is necessary that a man should not only know himself, but also a way of escape from himself, lest he should sink into chronic and indolent despair, or grow to tolerate, and even take pride in, the evil which he does not remove. The mirror must lead to the laver. Having learned what our true condition is, we must cease to look at ourselves, and have recourse to the cleansing bath which God has provided in the gospel for the sinner conscious of his sin. The fact that the laver was made of the looking-glasses teaches this practical

lesson to us. We see our impurity in order that we may apply for cleansing. Our uncomeliness is revealed to us for the very purpose of causing us to seek for the beauty of holiness.

2. The laver made of the looking-glasses of the women stood in the court of the tabernacle between the altar of burnt-offering and the door of the holy place. As the altar removed the legal obstacle that lay in the way of a sinner's access to God, so the laver removed the moral. The one by the atonement which it presented opened up the way to God; the other by the purification which it effected qualified the believer for coming into God's presence.

And viewed in this light, what an expressive symbol is it of the spiritual fountain opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness! The blood of the altar of burnt-offering and the water of the laver of purification both came out of the pierced side of the crucified Redeemer. The idea of the altar and the idea of the laver are both united and implied in the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel; that does not merely remove ceremonial and superficial defilements, but penetrates to the very source of corruption, and completely removes it. In the Levitical economy no washing was permitted to the priests, except what took place at the sacred vessel of the tabernacle appointed for the purpose. And so it is the precious blood of Christ alone that can wash away our sins, and give us that purity of heart which shall enable us to see

God. No penitential tears can wash away the stain of a single sin. The waters of baptism may flow over us ; the wine of the sacramental cup may be administered; penances and mortifications may be had recourse to, but all in vain ; our crimson and scarlet sins will prove indelible throughout all the painful process.

Our Lord sent the blind man, whose eyes He opened, to the pool of Siloam, that he might wash, and thus have his cure completed. The first object which his newly-acquired vision beheld was his own image reflected in the water. And is not this circumstance a type of what Jesus does still in the miracle of grace ? It is the washing in His own blood that completely cures our blindness, and enables us to see ourselves as we truly are. The laver in which we are washed becomes the mirror in which we see our own reflection ; and the mirror of self-complacency, in which hitherto we sought to see visions of our own comeliness whereof to glory in the flesh, is converted into the fountain of life in which the discovery of our own vileness is overborne by the discovery of the surpassing, all-compensating loveliness of Him in whom God sees no iniquity in Jacob, and no perverseness in Israel. Formerly hearers of the word, but not doers of it, we were like a man beholding his natural face in a glass ; “for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.” But now, washed in the blood of Jesus, sanctified by His Spirit, made new creatures in Him, “we all with open face beholding

as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

THE SUPERGA.¹

BEFORE a noble votive church I stood,
Raised o'er the dead of Savoy's royal blood,
Crowning the summit of a lonely height;
And what a wondrous view burst on my sight !
It seemed as if heaven's door were opened wide,
The very portals of the grave beside.
On the horizon, from the boundless plain,
From end to end rose the whole Alpine chain.
Each peak stood out against the cloudless blue ;
The more I gazed, the more sublime they grew.
Life rolled its green waves to their feet, and broke
In spray of pines upon each highest rock ;

¹ About five miles down the river Po, in the neighbourhood of Turin, there is an isolated hill, about 1,440 feet high, called the Superga. On the summit stands a magnificent dome-shaped church, built by Vittorio Amadeo II. in fulfilment of a vow when the French, in 1706, abandoned the siege of the Sardinian capital. In the subterranean vaults are the sarcophagi containing the remains of Princes of the House of Savoy. From the grassy terrace in front of the church may be obtained on a clear day one of the grandest views in Europe, embracing the vast green plain of Piedmont, with the Po glittering through it, and bounded on the horizon by the whole range of snowy Alps, from Mount Viso to Monte Rosa, rising straight up like an enormous wall, each peak clear cut like a cameo against the blue sky.

While far above the calm white snow-fields shone
Without a shadow in the noonday sun.
From every stain of life's contention free,
The radiant floor of heaven they seemed to be ;
By hands angelic swept and garnished, meet
For the free tread of pure immortal feet.
So overpowering was the sight, I knelt
Awestruck upon the grassy sod, and felt
As if I breathed the intoxicating air
Of other worlds, raised high above the care
And turmoil of the common earth ; each sense
In ecstasy stretched to its utmost tense.
How dark by contrast seemed the vaults beneath,
Where, in the dreadful loneliness of death,
Cut off from all that made their world, discrowned,
Slept the great rulers of the realms around ;
In all the splendour owning now no share,
Their dust to dust returning unaware !
But not in vain does the spectator face
This great apocalypse in such a place.
His mind may reason with assurance just,
Had man been meant to perish in the dust,
His God a vision so surpassing fair,
Would not have shown to mock his dark despair.
These scenes of earth are but the counterparts
Of nobler scenes, to which they lift our hearts.
These hoary Alps, whose pomp the horizon fills,
Are but the shadows of eternal hills.
The glow of superadded beauty seen
In every spot, by mortal vision keen,

Is kindled there, the shadowy path to light,
That leads us to the Presence Infinite ;
And be to us, lest we should go astray,
The symbol of His glory by the way.
From the cold ashes wasting in the tomb,
A deathless loveliness shall one day bloom ;
And eyes long sealed in dust, with rapt surprise,
Shall wake amid a grander paradise.

CHAPTER XI.

THE AUTUMN CROCUS.

"He shall return to the days of his youth."—JOB xxxiii. 25.

If the snowdrop may be called the morning star that ushers in the dawn of the floral year, the crocus may be said to be its sunrise. No vernal sight is more charming than the yellow yolks of this flower appearing in clusters above the naked soil in the desolate garden borders. And when the closed petals open their warm hearts to the sun, the golden cups are filled to the brim with beauty, and have a jewel-like brilliancy in the transfiguring light that reminds us of the fine gold of the New Jerusalem "like unto transparent glass." The first-born of the children of the sun, it is the beginning of his excellency and strength. It seems as if nature's wondrous alchemy had changed all vegetable life at this season into the crocus-gold; at the sight of which our heart leaps up as the poet's did when he saw the rainbow. But besides this beautiful species, whose perfection leaves nothing to be altered or added, there is another spring crocus whose original

purple and white blossom has sported into a great number of varieties under cultivation. It is the crocus of the Alps, where its flowers actually pierce the lingering snows in June, and form with them a more harmonious picture than with the purplish-brown of the naked earth out of which in our gardens they emerge. Its broad sheets of lilac bloom growing wild in the Nottingham meadows have a fine effect when, out of the early grass just beginning to be tinted with the first vivid green, they unfold the graceful curves of their petals to the fitful sunshine of the quiet spring afternoon.

So much is the crocus associated with the showers and the sunbeams of April, that it requires a special mental effort, even when the fact is known, to realize that it also blooms in the fading light and amid the withering foliage of September. There are well-known species of crocus that flower only during the autumnal months. In the same meadows of Nottingham where the purple crocus of spring flowers so abundantly, may be seen side by side with them dark green flowerless patches of the pale purple autumn crocus; and the curious thing is, that the flowers of the spring crocus appear before the leaves, which attain their full vigour and luxuriance when the blossoms have disappeared; whereas, on the other hand, the flowers of the autumn crocus appear after its leaves, that have grown all winter and summer, have withered. In Switzerland the sandy meadows along the banks of the Alpine streams are covered with myriads of autumn crocuses,

whose exquisitely pure and delicate amethystine hue in the glowing sunshine is a feast of colour of which the eye never wearies. And every one is familiar with the pale violet saffron crocus, once largely cultivated in this country for the production of saffron from its rich orange style, which blooms according to soil and position from the end of September to the beginning of November. If the yellow spring crocus is the golden sunrise of the floral year, the lilac autumn crocus is its sunset, when the mountains in the west have a rich purple bloom upon them, and the radiant amber clouds that lie over them seem like the stamens and petals of some gigantic blossom.

It is strange to think of this beautiful familiar flower being associated alike with a season in which nature is renewing her youth, and with a season when upon everything has settled down a long Sabbath of decay. It is not the only flower that has this peculiarity. The cyclamen is a spring flower, blossoming from April to the end of May, the leaves rising before the flowers; but there is a species whose flowers begin to appear at the end of August, continuing until October, the leaves rising after the blossoms and lasting through the whole winter and early spring. It covers every sheltered copse and mossy bank with profuse blooms, which look like the spectres of the spring flowers. Colourless and in a large measure scentless, it haunts the woods till the fall of the year, when it vanishes to reappear again in its representative species in spring. The snowflake is a resuscitated snowdrop, only of

larger size and less delicately fashioned. It stands in the same relation to the summer that the snowdrop does to the spring. It is simply a snowdrop striving to emulate the lily by its taller stems and leaves, its wider bell-shaped blossom composed of petals all white and similar, only touched on their tips with a faint yellowish green, and affording ample room for the play of the orange stamens. And I have frequently seen in different places in Southern Europe a little flower called the *Acis autumnalis*, which looks like an autumnal snowdrop; the pure snowy blossom of the spring flower being in its autumn representative tinted with a delicate pink blush. We thus find that Nature loves to repeat her forms, and to cast the productions of different seasons into the same mould, with characteristic differences which may serve to distinguish them.

The autumn crocus is a type of one of the most interesting phenomena of nature and of human life. In many departments there are numerous instances of the recurrence at a later period of something that belongs to an earlier time. The crimson and gold of the sunrise is repeated in the splendour of sunset. The common light of day has the same chromatic border at both its edges. The curtain of night at both its ends is finished off with fringes of rainbow loveliness, betraying by its selvage the rich variety of the threads that compose it. The morning star that heralds the dawn of day appears again in the evening, and announces the magic hour once sacred to God's presence, when His voice was heard among the trees

of the garden, and still keeping itself calm and pure from the touch of evil—the holiest hour of earth. The weather of September has many of the characteristics of the weather of April; the same rapid alternation of cloud and sunshine, of calm blue sky and dark storm-change. The woodland foliage of October departs with the same bright hues upon it with which it burst forth in May. In the late autumn the exquisite days of the Indian or St. Martin's summer come like a mockery of June, when there is such a universal harmony of earth and heaven that worship rises from the heart like a spring; and God gives us, ere stern winter closes the farewell scene, a Sabbath of the year, in which the sunbeams, having done their work in ripening the grain and the fruit, are now radiating their glory all around for pure enjoyment—a Sabbath which we do not have to make but only to keep holy. And whose heart is not touched to the core by the plaintive little song of the robin, heard in the quiet hush of the fading year in the aged apple-tree of the garden, from whose boughs ripened fruit and withered leaf have alike fallen? All the other birds are silent; but this tiny, wavering, uncertain trill is an echo at the far-off end of the year of the gush of song with which the fair young creation of spring was ushered in. The first authentic notification of spring is the song of the robin, and the last lamentation over the declining autumn is a plaintive repetition of it. Thus we find that wherever nature sets she has an after-glow that reminds us of the beauty and freshness of her prime.

The older one grows the more pathetic does the tender grace of each spring become. So much of what we loved and lost never comes back, that the beauty of the spring touches us like the brightness of a perfect day, when the grave is closing over dear eyes that shall never more behold it. Why should the inferior things of nature return, and those for whose use they were all made lie unconscious in the dust? The youthful heart feels itself in sympathy with spring. The universal freshness is as much a part of human youth as of the herbs of the field. All the sights, sounds, and impulses of the bright season have feelings and thoughts in the young bosom corresponding to them. Hope springs up with the sprouting grass, and love opens with the unfolding blossoms, and all life is vernal with the vernal landscape. But the aged heart has no part in the bright renewal. It is outside of all the music and bloom. It has outlived the fresh sympathies which the season could kindle into gladness, and can no more enter into the pleasures of hope. The aged live in the springs of the past; and their life goes forward to another and brighter spring in the eternal world, of which the springs of earth are only fleeting types and shadows. But though the bright flame of their spring crocus has burnt down to the socket, and only the green monotonous melancholy leaves remain behind, is there no re-kindling in the withered plot of their life of the autumn crocus, whose more sober hue befits the sadder character of the season? Yes! man's life, too, has its Indian summer and its autumn crocus. The

season of decay brings to him also reminiscences of the bright season of renewal. As on the woodland paths in spring, beneath the withered leaves of last year, when the south wind sweeps them away, the fairest flowers are seen growing ; so on the beaten tracks of the aged life, strewn with the wrecks of the past, are still seen flourishing the joys of youth, when a breeze of hope removes the superficial tokens of decay. And often, where others see only withered leaves, the heart feels the springing of vernal flowers.

Job, describing the happiness which he had in former years, and longing for its return, says, “O, that I were as I was in the days of my youth !” This phrase literally means the vintage season, the time of fruit-gathering ; and the authorized version, adopting another translation which the phrase also bears, unwittingly expresses the subtle connection between youth and age, the spring and the autumn, the blossoming and the fruit-time of life. The true days of Job’s youth was the period when his life became young again through the maturity of his powers and the consummation of his hopes. It was in the autumn of his life that he enjoyed all those blessings of prosperity whose loss he deplores ; and in calling it by a term which may be rendered either “days of youth,” or “time of gathering in fruits,” a striking example is given of the legitimate symbolic use of autumn as the season not of decay but of ripeness—fulness of power. That there are days and signs of youth in the time of the harvest and vintage of life every one can testify. The autumn fields

are “happy” with the flowers that tell of spring, with the remembrance of days that are no more ; and the Laureate’s beautiful words touch with a tender power the chord with which memory faithfully knits together the opening and the closing of human life. True, indeed, the autumn crocus is not the same flower as the spring crocus. It has hues deeper and more intense. It speaks of change and decay. Nature never goes back altogether to the point from which she started ; and she renews only some of the features of her dead past. So the joys of our early life which we recall in late years are not the same as when they stirred our young blood ; we colour them with the deeper and tenderer hues of our own spirit. The past seems to us so lovely because the present reflects upon it its own matured beauty and mournful intensity ; just as the level light of the afternoon transfigures with a warmer glow the trees and flowers that stood forth clear and cold in the morning rays. But the golden harvest, and the bright autumnal foliage, and the red fire of sunset burning low, are nearer the eternal fruition and the everlasting renewal than the field of the sower, and the April woodland, and the dewy sunrise. The gold of the withered leaf is that of the streets of the New Jerusalem !

In the physical sphere of man there are numerous instances of the spring crocus blooming again in the autumn. The cutting of new teeth and the growth of young hair in old age are by no means so infrequent as we might suppose. The eagle’s power of self-renewal has been manifested by many an aged form. And the

wonderful rejuvenescence of Abraham and Sarah when a century old shows to us that the human body has the same capabilities which the bird possesses in the annual renewing of its plumage, and the tree in the annual renewing of its leaves and flowers. What a beautiful autumn crocus was the coming of Isaac—the “laughter” of spring into the aged worn-out life of Abraham ! The venerable patriarch grew young again in the childhood of his son. A whole new world of beautiful emotions and first affections was called into existence by the presence of that child in his home. Every one has observed that as life nears its close it returns to the days of its youth, and brings back again much that marked its beginning. The old man becomes a little child ere he enters the kingdom of heaven. Second childhood plants its vernal flowers amid the sere and yellow leaves of nature’s decadence. And the grandfather has more sympathy with, and more that is akin to, the little grandchild, who reminds him of what he himself once was, than with his own busy careworn son who has left his childhood so far behind him.

In the mental sphere the growth of the autumn crocus is much more common than in the physical, and much more precious and beautiful. The physical signs of growth in the midst of old age strike us as a painful incongruity. It is a pathetic and pitiful sight ; for the bloom of youth comes back in such a case without its strength and hope, and the vigour of the child without its unconscious innocence and fresh beauty. But there is no such drawback connected with the renewal of the

mind in old age. How numerous and splendid are the examples of intellect disclosing its fullest powers at the very close of life ! As an old man Cato learnt Greek. Goethe was fourscore years old when he completed the second part of *Faust*. Jussieu between his eighty-third and eighty-eighth year occupied himself with dictating a new edition of his famous "Introduction to Botany," not in his mother tongue, but in the most elegant Latin. Mason, on his seventy-second birthday, wrote one of the most beautiful sonnets in our language ; and Milton produced the grandest work of his wonderful intellect when he was nearly sixty years of age. It is related of James Watt that he mastered the Anglo-Saxon language with facility when he was upwards of seventy ; a task which he had undertaken in order to prove whether his intellectual faculties were then unimpaired. And who does not know how early tastes revive in declining years, when the pressure of the world's cares and activities in an assured position is removed, as the native wild flowers bloom again in the fallow field which is no more turned up by the plough ? We go back to the poets who first showed us the beauty of the world, and to the philosophers who first taught us the power of thought, with fresh interest and new enjoyment, acquired by our own wider experience. Literary men have often recorded the peculiar delight with which in their later years they have returned to the studies of their youth. What is genius but a return of the mind from exhausted ways and methods to the freedom, simplicity, and ever-

fresh novelty of nature? The highest genius is that in which manhood's trained power of expression is combined with an eternal element of childhood. There is a spontaneity and an unconsciousness in its art, an instinctiveness in its revelations, which belong essentially to youth, and which, appearing amid the matured experiences of after life, has the charm of a September day which reminds us of April.

The higher we climb the hill of knowledge—the nobler and more elevated the thoughts we make our own—the more do we bring back the joyous, fearless mind of childhood, which we believe is fresh from the hand of God, and still bears upon it traces of its likeness to the Uncreated Light; just as the Alpine traveller sees on the very edge of the glacier on the mountain height the same kind of exquisitely pure and lovely flowers which in March and April in the valleys skirted the edge of winter. M. de Tocqueville used to remark that mental exertion was as necessary in age as in youth, nay, even more necessary. Man, he would say, is a traveller towards a colder and colder region, and the higher his latitude the faster he ought to walk. Many give up all thought of beginning a new study when they have reached the autumn of life under the impression that it is not worth while. They fancy themselves older than they really are, and so give up further intellectual effort with a certain indolent feeling of relief. The Chinese encourage their students to persevere in their mental pursuits to extreme old age, by bestowing the golden button of

the successful candidate upon a man when he is eighty years old, although he has failed in all his previous examinations.

The love of nature is a sentiment in which we carry our youth along with us through all the dreary wastes of middle age, and it revives with peculiar force at the close of life. Sated with the possessions and experiences of life, we come back in the end of our days with the old freshness of feeling to the simple familiar objects that once formed all our joy. The gold of the vernal crocus yields us more wealth of pleasure than all the gold of the banks that we have accumulated : and the purple bloom of its autumn relation is more precious than all the purple and fine linen in which we have succeeded in clothing ourselves. The heart never grows really old if it brings with it from childhood a lively interest in the varied objects of nature. These objects soothe and ennable, not by their own intrinsic charms only, but by their immediate connection with that spiritual world whose outward and visible representatives they are ; that world which is ever near to us, but especially so in the solitudes of nature where we are face to face with the unsullied works of God. That world never grows old, and the objects of nature which reveal it to our senses are permanently young. The foliage that springs from an old withered tree, for instance, is as perfect as that which grew on its first shoot ; the grass grows as green now as a thousand years ago ; the streams are as fresh and the sunshine as bright. And therefore the heart that communes with the spiritual through the medium

of these natural things, according to the Divine Sacramental law by which spiritual blessings and their influences on the heart are best enjoyed in the presence of their material representatives, shares in the perpetual youth of nature. It will have a perennial well of gladness springing up in it—an artesian well gladdening the desert of old age, whose waters come from the far-off hills of childhood; and under the snows that have whitened the mountain-tops of life, there will be preserved many a bright nook, green with all the spring freshness of thought and feeling.

But it is in the sphere of the soul that the autumn crocus blooms most beautifully. The rejuvenescence of the mental faculties, the renewal of the intellect, belongs only to the exceptionally great and gifted. It is only men of rare faculty and genius who become young again in their minds; whose intellectual life acts more vitally and intensely when decay has touched all their physical life. But the rejuvenescence of the soul, the renewal of the spiritual life, may be the experience of all. This youthful victoriousness—the inward man being renewed more and more while the outward man is decaying—is the glory of every true Christian's old age. Only the fire that comes down from Heaven can preserve the youth of the spirit amid all the changes and sorrows of life. Religion really lived keeps the heart always young, always tender. Its truths belong to a world which knows no change, no succession of time; and therefore the soul that cherishes them, and is moulded by their power, partakes of their unchanging freshness.

Our blessed religion teaches us that nothing beautiful or good once possessed is wholly lost to us ; that there is a deeper truth in the words, "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever," than even its poet knew. That thing of beauty goes away as our Saviour went away, only to come again, dearer and closer—to be with us alway, even unto the end of the world. Our religion engages to give to him that overcometh the besetting sins which lay waste the life and make the heart old—to eat of those fruits of the tree of life which once in the garden of innocence hung within reach of infant humility and helplessness. And out of the sunset and the after glow, when the glory and the dream of life have vanished, comes the sweetest of all its promises, "I will give him the morning star." And He who is the resurrection and the life—the Alpha and the Omega—will make the outgoings of the fair, innocent morning of the world's childhood—with its fresh poetic visions, so dear even to remember in this weary, worn-out prosaic world—to rejoice for all who live and believe in Him ; and the hour of splendour in the grass and glory in the flower will come back again.

Youth's joys to cheer life's autumn gloom,
Fond memory back will bring ;
As in September fields will bloom,
The crocus of the spring.

So may we live, that all our past
May light our future track ;
And all our best for us at last,
In higher form come back.

A CORN-FIELD IN GLEN CROE.

DEEP in the emerald cup of circling hills,
A corn-field lies along the rugged bank
Of a wild river, that has cut its way
Through rocky orbit, filled with pastures old
Lit up with yellow stars of tormentil,
Where once had laughed the blue eye of a lake.
Redeemed from nature's wildness by man's toil,
The little lonely croft smiles in the waste,
And speaks of all the tender things of home.
The poppy kindles not its cross of fire,
Nor lifts the corn-flower its blue banner there,
Nature's stern struggle with itself to wage.
The mountains dower with their own floral gifts
The foster child they have so gently reared ;
And twine among its yellow hair their wreaths
Of purple scabious, snowy euphrasy,
And silken Alpine lady's-mantle rare.
Day after day I've watched the lean ears fill
With secret sweetness from the earth and sky,
And o'er each stem and glume the russet hue
Of ripeness creeping from the sunsets low,
Until the field, whose greenness blended once
With the green hills, now stands a thing apart,
A patch of mimic sunshine prisoned there,
A golden aureole round Nature's brow.
What sacred memories gather round the plot,
That take us back to old idyllic days,
When all men laboured in the harvest-field,

And deemed its joy the typal joy of life !
The first ripe crop that grew above the grave
Of the old world, arched by the covenant bow,
The pledge and surety of all harvests since ;
The plenteous years that fed the famished ones
Upon the Nile's green banks ; the touching tale
Of the fair Gleaner in her kinsman's fields,
Who found love's solace for the stranger's heart ;
The Sabbath walk among the rustling corn,
With Him who claimed to be the Sabbath's Lord,
When His disciples plucked the husky ears,
And broke their fast with meat from God's own hand,
And felt it was a sacrament indeed ;
And more than all, the wondrous miracle,
Wrought far from cultivated haunts of men,
When the slow seasons' work was done at once,
And bread that never knew the curse of toil
Grew swiftly as it passed from hand to hand
Along the hungry ranks. These memories
The ages and the generations link,
And make one family of all mankind,
Living in one great home, and fed each day
From one kind Father's store. This corn-field seems
A silent gospel. Here I see once more
The Master's steps beside the conscious corn,
Making a Sabbath of the common day ;
I see the hand that works behind the veil,
Stretched forth anew to multiply the loaves,
And crown with heavenly glory common things.
Above, Ben Arthur in the opal air

Lifts its huge altar to heaven's outer door ;
Beside me chants its ceaseless hymn of praise
The pure-lipped river ; while the laden ears
Store up the manna, like the pot of old
Within the Hebrew ark. The sordid world,
With all its money-changers, care-worn toils,
Is shut out from this shrine not made with hands.
From sowing time, when man had done his part,
To reaping time, when man must work again,
The field has been in the sole charge of God ;
The farmer slept and woke, and all the time
The earth brought forth its fruit unaided—how,
Man knoweth not. Beneath the patient heavens,
In presence of all enemies subdued,
The storm and drought, the blight of worm and rust,
God spread a table in this wilderness—
His annual corn beside the unfailing stream,
The bread and water that are sure to all.
With thankful hearts shall we not worship here,
Look to those higher hills whence comes our help,
And feel that man lives not by bread alone,
But by each word that cometh from God's mouth,
Expressed in Nature's mute symbolic speech,
In lofty mountain and in lowly glebe !

CHAPTER XII.

THE AMARANTH.

“That fadeth not away.”—I PETER i. 4.

NOTHING can be lovelier than the meadows of Greece and Southern Italy, covered in spring with myriads of wild flowers, whose vivid colours are illuminated by the strong light of a southern sun, which defines outline and shadow and gives value to the faintest hue. These flowers grow in rich profusion year after year among the hoary ruins of man’s work, renewing their brightness while all around them is decaying, and adorning with a garland of ever-living beauty the haunts of the gods of old, and the scenes of departed greatness and pride. And yet instead of transferring in imagination to the Elysian fields this goodly sight with which the classic poets were familiar from their childhood, and thus making it ideal, seen paler in the celestial light, but not more beautiful, they pictured their pagan paradise as remote from it as possible. Out of all the vast wealth of earth’s floral beauty, they selected only two flowers to adorn its dim and

misty scenes ; and these by no means the fairest and most graceful, possessing no representative character to entitle them to the immortality thus conferred upon them.

The Sicilian legend of the Rape of Proserpine depicts the maiden as gathering, in the meadows of Enna, the snow-white lilies and the golden and crimson flowers that hid the grass with a maze of dazzling brightness like the fret-work of sunset clouds. Seized by Pluto while engaged in this innocent amusement, she was carried down to the infernal regions, with her hands still full of the mortal flowers she had gathered, shedding their strange radiance over the joyless land of shadows. These flowers became immortal, and year after year bloomed in the sunless and dewless air, without a blossom falling or a leaf fading. But this beautiful fable stands out in marked contrast to the common dreams of the poets. It is a gleam of familiar light seen in the mist. The flowers of Proserpine introduced an unknown sunshine into a shady place. They were not natives of this waste outside region ; they did not grow in the barren soil. They were only sweet reminiscences of the dear old scenes of earth—tenderly cherished amid associations altogether different.

The two flowers specially mentioned by the poets as growing in the fields of the immortals were the asphodel and the amaranth. Numerous beautiful allusions occur to them in the classic writings ; but no such description is given as would enable us to identify them with any of the flowers at present growing in the famous scenes

of antiquity. The plant now known as the asphodel grows in great profusion everywhere in Southern Europe. It is a kind of lily—our dear old English word daffodil being but a corruption of it—distinguished by its thick tuft of long narrow leaves, out of which rises a tall rod covered with white star-like flowers, whose petals are streaked with purple lines. It is a majestic flower, and gives a fine effect to the foreground of an Italian landscape. Whether this was the Homeric asphodel which blossomed early across the Styx, and which the Greeks planted in their graveyards as food for the Shades, we do not know, but it is certainly worthy of such a destiny. It has a grey spectral gleam when seen in misty weather; and even in the clear garish noon its spire of blossoms seems to have derived its silvery sheen from the cold moonbeams, rather than from the warm sunshine. A bare hillside covered with its dark green grassy tufts and ghostly flowers looks like a bit of extra-mundane scenery.

The amaranth is involved in still deeper obscurity. The flower known to the classic poets, we believe, however, to be the *Gomphrena globosa*, as its round flowers of a deep purple resembling those of the common clover, produced on long stiff stalks bare of leaves, answer better than any other species the description of Pliny. The calyx of this globeamaranth which constitutes the flower, is of so dry a texture that it seems dead even while it is growing; and it is to this fine thin membranous texture that the flower owes its glossy beauty, and its persistent endurance. It was a favourite

decoration at funerals. Homer describes the Thessalians as wearing chaplets of amaranth ; and Milton, when speaking of the multitude of angels before God casting down their crowns “inwove with amarant and gold,” at His feet, says :—

“ Immortal amaranth, a flower which once
In Paradise, fast by the Tree of Life,
Began to bloom ; but soon, for man’s offence,
To Heaven removed, where first it grew, there grows,
And flowers aloft, shading the fount of Life,
And where the river of bliss through midst of Heaven
Rolls over Elysian flowers her amber stream.”

The globeamaranth belongs to a family whose flowers, notwithstanding their small size individually, produce a striking effect by the great numbers of them that are clustered together. They have properly speaking no corolla, but produce the appearance of blossoms by their coloured sepals and bracts, whose texture is so dry and thin that they do not decay like the other parts of flowers. Upwards of three hundred species are known, growing as herbs or shrubs in tropical and temperate regions. The leaves of many kinds are wholesome food, and are not unfrequently used in their native countries like spinach, to which indeed the family is closely allied botanically. They were eaten as kitchen herbs by the ancient Greeks ; and hence they were appropriately laid upon graves as the food of the dead. Among the most characteristic and best known examples of the family may be mentioned the curious *cockscomb* of our greenhouses, and the princes feather and love-lies-bleeding of our gardens with their crimson velvety tassels.

But whatever may have been the original plant which gave rise to the amaranth of the Elysian fields, it has come in our common language to be regarded, not as a distinct botanical species, but as the type of a peculiar class of plants, comprehending many species and even genera, which, on account of their dry, juiceless texture, retain their colour and form indefinitely, and are therefore called immortelles, or everlasting flowers. However widely they may differ in other respects, all these curious plants have one remarkable feature in common. The petals of the corolla, which in other plants are usually the largest and most brilliant parts of the inflorescence, in them are reduced to the smallest size, and are made sober and inconspicuous ; while the sepals of the calyx and the bracts, which in other plants are modest and subordinate, assume in them the predominance, are gaily coloured, and owing to their naturally dry, scarious texture are permanent and indestructible. The petals of flowers being the parts most modified from the typical leaf of vegetation, and having only a temporary purpose to serve, are exceedingly fugacious ; whereas the sepals and the bracts are parts comparatively little modified, have a more continuous use in the economy of the plant, and are therefore usually more persistent. It is to the durability and showiness of their involucral bracts therefore, more than to their actual florets, that the beauty of the everlastings is due. The great majority of the species are natives of warm countries, such as South Africa and Australia, where the vegetation generally is less succulent and more leathery-

leaved than that of moist, cool climates ; but many of them are easily cultivated in our own country, and are very extensively grown in Southern France and Germany, from whence immense quantities are sent to our large London warehouses. All over the Continent they are used for bouquets, wreaths, or for general floral decorations. From France and Germany we have learned the custom of laying wreaths and crosses made of them upon the coffins and graves of the dead ; and that custom now very widely prevails in this country.

Many of the everlastings cultivated in our greenhouses are strikingly beautiful. They belong chiefly to the composite family. The French immortelle with small yellow flowers, of which the chaplets used at Père la Chaise are made, is furnished by *Helichrysum orientale*, a native originally of Crete and South Africa, but now largely cultivated in the south of France in the neighbourhood of Hyères, entirely for the sake of its flower-heads. Various other species of *Helichrysum* from Australia and South Africa have flower-heads an inch across, varying in colour from white to yellow, orange, crimson and pink, some annual and others perennial. On our dry moorlands and hillsides an everlasting grows in great quantities, with silvery foliage and little tomentose balls of flowers of a pure white or a pale pink colour. It is known by the name of the Catspaw or Mountain Everlasting. And on the summits of our highest hills a tiny species of cudweed forms, on the bare tempest-beaten turf, a knot of leaves, out of which emerges a pale brown

blossom, without any form or comeliness, bravely maintaining its existence in spite of the fierce buffettings of the polar blasts. But the most interesting species of all is the Edelweiss of the Swiss Alps, so popular among the peasantry on account of its romantic associations. It is distinguished for its beautiful whorl of leaves springing star-like from beneath the closely-set small yellowish flowers, and almost covered with pure white down. This white down, which covers the leaves of so many of the mountain composites, reaches its highest development in a most extraordinary everlasting called the Raoulia, which forms gigantic woolly masses, spreading over the ground on the higher mountains of New Zealand, and looking at a distance so like a flock of sheep grazing that it has become known to the settlers as the "vegetable sheep." But besides the great variety of natural plants of the everlasting character, numerous flowers of widely different families, which do not possess this peculiarity, are dried and preserved on the Continent with their natural colours, along with a host of ornamental grasses. In Germany this art is carried to great perfection, and flowers and grasses thus treated are dyed in a great variety of unnatural colours. Of late a great improvement has been effected in the artificial colouring of immortelles; but there is still ample room for the exercise of a more refined taste, many of the flowers and grasses operated upon being too graceful and delicate to bear heavy colouring, and becoming in the process positively ugly.

The instinct that has led to the choice or creation of these natural or artificial everlastings is easily accounted for. Most of those that come to this country from France and Germany are used at Christmas-time, when all vegetation is dead or dormant out of doors, and even the conservatory has hardly a blossom to show. They also supply the place of freshly-cut flowers in other seasons—when these fail or the resources are not equal to the demand. But the deeper reason doubtless is the desire which every one feels to perpetuate the beauty of the world around us. The saddest thing about that beauty is its evanescent character. When the summer foliage has developed its utmost fulness of form and hue, it begins to fade; when the plant crowns its life with the radiant blossom, in that self-kindled flame of loveliness it expires. The height of its perfection is the funeral pyre upon which it is consumed into the grey ashes out of which it arose. We wish to arrest this beauty that captivates us and make it our own for ever. And hence the favour with which we regard those flowers, which in nature seem to escape the general doom of decay, and preserve their charms uninjured by autumn's blight or winter's frost ; that once perfected keep intact the seal of that perfection for ever, and henceforth know no quickening thrill of spring, or magic unfolding of summer, but remain for ever the same. These embalmed flowers—floral mummies—or beautiful fossils of the air, as they may be called, conserve for us the passing beauty of the world and the glory of the

summer that has vanished away. They appeal to that touching yearning for permanence which amid the vain show in which we live has taken such a deep hold of our hearts. In them our affections find an eddy in which time plays as it were with its own seasons, and the ever-flowing stream of progress dimples upon itself. They afford an anchor to our hearts by which they may be steadied for a little amid the incessant change and the bewildering whirl of things.

And how appropriately do these never-withering flowers form wreaths for the dead ! The lush life-full flowers of summer are associated with the tragedies, the silences, the heart-breaks of life, and come in with their own voiceless unconfuted arguments fresh as it were from the Creator's heart, when human words are vain, and even music fails to touch a chord, to tell us that the power within all silences and pains and tragedies is love, and that the possibilities of life are endless. Save for the wonderful flower-facts before us we could never have dreamed that such beauty lurked in the dark earth, was latent in the dry root or tiny seed. And so we bring these fair summer flowers to the sick-room and the bedside of the dying, and place them around the known unknown face so pathetic in its white patience, and lay them on the green mound which is all that belongs now to our beloved ones of the beauty and glory of the world. But they wither and pass away like what we loved and lost ; on them too is written the doom of mortality ; they seem more akin to the decay of the

grave than to the unchangeable affections of the world within, and the immortal hopes of the world beyond. The immortelles therefore are more in harmony with our feelings ; they supply what the other flowers lack. Unhurt by the mouldering decay of the sepulchre, they seem the fittest types of that human love which is not of the things that rust and perish in the tomb. They tell us that there is a Beyond for love, though not for pride ; for the things associated with the flowers, though not for the things associated with gold : that there is something besides the divine aspirations of religion which will survive and endure for ever ; something purely human and yet susceptible of immortality. They give us the blessed assurance that life here below is not all transitory and vain—“a chain of yesterdays, which have but lighted kings the way to dusty death.” Laid in the form of the wreath or the cross on the marble head-stone, or on the green sod, they whisper to us that, planted together in the likeness of Christ’s death, we shall be planted together in the likeness of His resurrection. For if the lowly flowers in their death retain the likeness of their life unchanged, and triumph over the physical forces which seek to decay and decompose them, surely the lofty creature made in the image of God will retain that image unimpaired amid all the decays of death and the grave, and this same mortal shall put on immortality, and this same human love shall be glorified.

The amaranth of the ancients was a fitting type of

their future state. The immortality they conceived was as lifeless and joyless as the juiceless leaves and flowers of this representative plant, which, though they preserved their form and colour after having been plucked for an indefinite period, had none of the bloom and freshness of life about them. Their hell had indeed a singularly distinct and vivid realization in their minds; there are no pictures of the fate of the wicked more dreadful even in the Inferno of Dante than those which their poets present before us in Ixion and his wheel, Tantalus and his draught of water, Sisyphus and his stone, Prometheus and his vulture, and the Danaids and their leaky buckets. Their only distinct idea of a future world was confined to the incidents of punishment. All distinctness, on the other hand, disappears as we enter the melancholy meadows of asphodel which constituted their shadowy image of Elysium. Their amaranthine bowers were dry and ghostly, having the semblance of life, but none of its play and blessedness. The world of the immortals was a world of shadows inhabited by shades, wherein there was nothing but the *exuviae* of life—the phantoms of former existence. Ossian never imagined more misty outlines, or peopled his heath of Lodi with forms more pale and unsubstantial. There the experiment of the alchemist was performed on a great scale. Out of the ashes of the flower that had been consumed arose a delicate apparition of stalk and leaf and blossom—the phantom plant—faithful to its former image as the lovely transcript of scenery in

still water, but without the old bloom and fragrance. Well might Achilles in such an Elysium declare—

“ I had rather live
The servile hired for hire, and eat the bread
Of some man scantily himself sustained,
Than sovereign empire hold o'er all the shades.”

Not a whit more satisfactory are the Christian conceptions of the future world in the minds of many persons. They have fearfully vivid ideas of the punishment of the wicked; but regarding the reward of the righteous they believe in the most literal manner that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” It is a far-off realm, receding into dimness and vagueness by the distance to which we remove it, like a star of the tenth magnitude; leaving all past experience, all hopes and forms of happiness which the imagination had hitherto conceived, and the heart had learned to love, utterly behind it. And hence it is that descriptions of heaven, however gorgeous and transcendental, usually fail to interest or impress us. The mind is lost in the vagueness, and the heart knows not where to fix. Permanence is the only definite idea we associate with it. We accept the jewelled walls and golden streets of the heavenly city, substances the most precious and indestructible that we know, as satisfactory symbols of its unchanging endurance. And the contrast between this feature and our experience of the fleeting possessions and enjoyments of earth

is so grateful, that we care not if the one element of permanence be secured even at the expense of all that makes permanence desirable. We, whose gourd grows up in a night and withers in a night, fancy that we should be perfectly happy in fields of immortal asphodels, and under the shadow of amaranthine bowers.

But can permanence—beautiful sculpture of life as it were, placed safe and changeless in Elysian bowers—in reality satisfy this nature of ours which we would transfer to eternity? That nature has been formed and educated amid perpetual change, and all its consciousness is built upon and interlaced with it. We owe to the death that is always with us half the beauty of every scene, and more than half the enjoyments we derive from life. How then should we like to live here in a world where the only flowers were immortelles, and the only trees cypresses and yews, pines and evergreens? And is the idea any more tolerable because we place the scene beyond the grave? We enjoy these permanent and unchangeable forms of vegetation by way of contrast to the deciduous and fading forms that awaken the tenderest and deepest feelings of our hearts by the vernal and autumnal changes they undergo, and for the sake of the needed lesson which they teach of permanence in the midst of change, raising our thoughts from a scene of fleeting shadows to a scene of enduring realities. But were the woods formed of, and the fields decked with, such unfading objects alone, our eye would weary of the eternal monotony, and our minds would grow

stagnant in the everlasting sameness. And transferring the conception to the future world we should in such a case sympathize with the little girl who asked her father, “If she were so good that she *had* to go to heaven, whether after a hundred years God would not let her die out!” Change, we must remember, is not in itself an element of misery. All changes are not necessarily sad. There are changes caused by sin—changes on the downward scale—death, decay of feeling, retrogression, corruptions and all unrests associated with sin ; and these changes will doubtless be altogether unknown in heaven. But there are other changes associated with holiness and life and progress—changes on the upward scale, from one degree of beauty and perfection and enjoyment to another ; and we cannot imagine a heaven suitable for beings like us without these. True to human nature, the Bible in its revelations of the future world brings before us pictures of such changes. It speaks to us indeed of the everlasting materials of the eternal city, but it shows us, in the midst of its streets and on either side of the river, the tree of life bearing twelve manner of fruits, to which every month brings the freshness of spring and the ripeness and mellowness of autumn, which shows in constant succession opening and fading blossoms and forming and falling fruits. And the river in whose waters the healing foliage and the satisfying fruit are mirrored, is no dull Lethe—stagnant and motionless, for ever the same, but a river of life, incessantly changing and being renewed—the very fulness of all life—in which the past, present, and

future are seen in perpetual flux. And these objects are typical and representative. They indicate what the nature of the scenery and of the life of heaven will be.

The changeless asphodel and amaranth may form the adorning of the pagan heaven ; but they have no place in the Christian's fields of living green beyond the river. We are begotten again unto a *lively* hope—a living, life-ful hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. That phrase, “fadeth not away,” is the translation in our version of the Greek word *amarantos*, from which the name of the amaranth is derived. And that very word “inheritance” tells us that it is no strange, unknown realm into which we shall be ushered by death ; but a familiar scene, which we shall be prepared by our acquaintance with earthly things, which are the draughts and shadows and foretastes of its heavenly things, to enter into and enjoy, as the heir who has grown up on an estate enters into his inheritance when he comes of age. Our Christianity teaches us by the ascension of Christ's body and the resurrection of our own, that the whole scene with its circumstances and objects must be accommodated to the tastes and character of man, as he now is, only purified and glorified, to the mortal immortalized. It is not a world of shadows, but a world glowing with all the infinite beauty and variety of life. The tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit every month, will be its appropriate symbol, and not the dry, changeless amaranth. And all who here have worn the white flower of a blameless life

will find, to their glad surprise, that the waste outside wilderness which they pictured the heaven that awaited them to be, is a part of their own earthly home, made to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

THE LAST DAISY.

OUR dear wee Callum, on the river's brink,
A solitary ox-eye daisy found,
That lingered in the late September light,
The last of its fair sisterhood ; with all
The sadness in its eye of joys o'erpassed ;
Its golden disk and silver halo dimmed
By Autumn's breath. Scarce taller than its stem,
With large round eyes of wonder innocent,
And almost on a level with the flower.
The child gazed fondly on the lone earth-star,
Raying its beauty round it in the grass,
And saw strange mystic glory in its face,
Unknown to older eyes which sin has filmed.
Do not the angels of these little ones
Behold always the Father's smiling face
Bent o'er each thing of beauty He has made ?
With childlike glee, subdued by soft regret,
He plucked the precious prize, and quaintly said,
“ ‘Tis the last gowan of the happy year ! ”
Fair flower ! fair child ! so lovely in their life,
And not divided in their lovely death !
In one short week the little feet were still,
The soul-full eyes closed to all earthly sights.

He vanished with the daisies loved so well,
And with him all the summer of our heart.
We will not murmur ; for a tenderer Hand
Than ours has plucked our human daisy here,
To plant it in His fadeless fields above,
Beside the stream of life. Not his the fate
Of the late autumn flower to linger on,
With all his loved ones gone, and pine away
In the cold feeble light of lonely age.
Kind death has saved him all the waste of life,
Conserved his beauty at the fairest point,
And kept for us our boy in heaven unchanged
Through all our changes—an immortal child
To love for evermore.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GATES OF PEARL.

"And the twelve gates were twelve pearls ; every several gate was of one pearl."—REV. xxi. 21.

THE earthly Jerusalem and its temple had fallen. To the lonely exile of Patmos the event was one of awful significance. The foundations of the universe seemed to be removed, and a vast void created which nothing could fill. In the deep despondency created by the knowledge of the fallen Jewish commonwealth, the apostle was permitted to gaze with tearful eyes, through the door opened in heaven, upon the archetypal vision. Like Moses on the Mount—who saw the pattern of the tabernacle in the wilderness before it was constructed—the seer of Patmos, on his solitary rock in the sea, saw the pattern of the earthly Jerusalem after it was destroyed. When the real vanished, the ideal, of which the real was but a mere passing shadow, was revealed in all its glory. All that was essential in the old polity, with its visible accompaniments, re-appeared in the new, associated

with things unspeakably higher and more precious. The vision discovered to him the principle and meaning of the earthly facts that had been familiar to him from his earliest years, led him away from the transitory and the accidental to the fixed and enduring, and comforted him with a deep sense of the harmony and permanence of the Divine plan amid all the varying dispensations of Providence.

It was no fantastic vision separated from all earthly associations that the seer of Patmos beheld. On the contrary, it was linked to all that was dear and sacred to himself and to his race. The forms were the same, but the materials were changed. The old walls of the earthly city—stained with the russet hues of time and battered by the fierce assaults of war—now appeared as a glorious cincture composed of twelve massive courses or tiers of burnished jewels, clasping the heavenly city round and round as with a marriage ring of inviolable sanctity and incorruptible unity. It was a rainbow of precious stones ; a solid and enduring rainbow, confirming and establishing for evermore what the sign of the earthly covenant, imprinted upon a fleeting vapour by a passing sunbeam, intimated to the generations of perishing men. The toil-worn streets, defiled by sordid traffic and trodden by weary human feet, appeared paved with gold, clear and transparent as glass, pure for the tread of feet which the Saviour's hands had washed, and the sweep of robes which His blood had made white. The materials of the earthly city were substances that faded and decayed, for they

had only a temporary purpose to serve ; those of the heavenly were unchangeable and indestructible, matter in its most sublime and enduring form connected with the unceasing service of bodies and spirits of just men made perfect.

Out of the sunset splendours of his nation's glory emerged the sunrise of the everlasting commonwealth ; and in hues and forms suggested by the aerial landscapes of the *Ægean*, the cheering vision manifested itself to him. On the lonely heights of Patmos, we can picture the aged apostle standing at early dawn and looking eastward to the point where the sea and the sky blended together on the horizon. He sees the faint grey glimmer that marks the struggle of light with darkness along that line. And gradually as the sun rises the neutral tint glows with burnished hues of crimson and purple ; the amber colours passing at last into the clear crystal of the new-born day, and the azure that cools the sky when the sun has taken complete possession of it, and the strife with darkness is over. Like these different layers of aerial hues, marking the varying struggles in the birth of day, are the different tiers of gleaming jewels in the walls of the celestial city, each stone being a letter in a radiant alphabet, the crimson hue of suffering passing into the white of purity and the blue of calm, settled peace, and the golden radiance of joyful triumph, and the amethystine hue of hope, of the far-distance of ineffable things. The gates of pearl seem like the soft fleecy clouds on the horizon, which stand between the dark-

ness and the dawn, and behind which the sun is struggling to appear. As they open up, letting out the imprisoned sunshine, they disclose in their inner depths the radiant hues which glorify the sunrise; just as through the gates of pearl thrown wide open the awe-struck apostle beholds in the innermost centre of the sapphire light the unspeakable splendours of the heavenly city.

Not from his recollections of his own old home could the unique feature of the gates of pearl have been derived. It must have been suggested by the circumstances of his island home, as Peter's vision on the housetop at Joppa took shape from the hunger of his body and the occupation of the tanner with whom he lodged. There was nothing to remind him of the gates of pearl in the earthly Jerusalem. That city was perched on a far inland height. It was a mountain city breathing mountain air. Unlike other capitals, it had no connection or commerce with the outlying nations. No murmur of foaming wave mingled with the hum of its traffic; no salt-breath of ocean came with its crisp keenness and memories of far-distant regions into the close air of its crowded streets. The sleep that is among the lonely hills was around it. Its gates were made of the stout cedars of Lebanon or the oaks of Bashan, or the brass of Hermon, the productions of the land itself, and they opened and closed not for commercial but for agricultural purposes. Why then should the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem be so different?

Why should they be composed each of one pearl, of a substance that is intimately connected with the sea, whose associations bring the mind out of the shadow of the inland mountains to the shores of the open ocean, and from the lonely sanctuary of a secluded race to the wide and busy parliament of the world? I believe that a special emphasis is placed upon this remarkable feature of the heavenly vision. Let us examine it particularly then, and we shall find that it is full of precious significance.

I. The first point of consideration is the number of the gates. There were twelve of these gates ; three on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. What a contrast does this feature of the heavenly city present to the narrowness and exclusiveness of the old Jewish polity! The Jews were the hermits of the human race. They were kept apart from all other nations on the high plateau which had walls of mountain, desert, river-trench, and stormy sea hemming them in on every side. It was considered unlawful for a Jew to keep company with or come in to one of another nation. The people prided themselves on their exclusive privileges as the favourites of heaven, and pushed to an extreme the restrictions of their religion. Even St. John himself could not altogether divest his mind of his Jewish prejudices. He could hardly yet realize the idea that the world was greater in God's eyes than Judæa ; that the Church of Christ was to be one in which the Jew was to have no exclusive privileges and the Gentile to be subject to no

disabilities. And therefore he needed the silent rebuke presented in the vision of the New Jerusalem as a type of the boundless freeness and fulness of the love that passeth knowledge. Unlike the little Jewish capital, type of its narrow creed, the heavenly city was vast as the largest thought or hope could compass, a perfect cube of twelve thousand furlongs, capable of containing all the cities of the world within its circuit. Through the earthly Jerusalem no river ran, no highway passed. Its gates were shut for safety and security in its mountain fastness. But through the heavenly Jerusalem the broad full river of life flowed ; and through its gates or up the river the nations brought their wealth into it. Through its gates, open to the four quarters of the globe, a multitude which no man could number of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues had entered in. From the east and the west, from the north and the south, they sat down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. There was a time when the beloved disciple might have felt what Peter felt when the sheet full of four-footed beasts and creeping things was let down before him. The spectacle of aliens from the commonwealth of Israel admitted to the same blessedness as the chosen people, would have tempted him to exclaim, "Not so, Lord." Even now he is overwhelmed with astonishment at the unexpected sight, and can only give to the angel's question, "Who are these ? and whence came they ?" the wondering answer of one in a dream, "Sir, thou knowest."

There is, I cannot help thinking, something significant in the very place where the vision of the New Jerusalem was given to St. John. It was not in a narrow, consecrated place, connected with the limitations of thought and feeling, but on an island in the ocean, surrounded by the mighty waters, emblem of the Divine justice that is broad and deep as floods. There is a similar significance in the place where Christ gave His last command to the disciples. It was a mountain in Galilee, the least Jewish part of Palestine, far removed from the temple and the city of Jerusalem, from all sacerdotalism and ritualism, from all the restraints of human creeds and ordinances. There above the low, petty world of human strifes and questionings, with the largest view of God's world around Him, and the widest horizon of sympathy and hope; on a mountain, such as that on which Satan showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and promised to give them to Him, if He would fall down and worship him—there He declared the vast extent of His kingdom, and commanded the disciples to teach all nations.

The vision of the New Jerusalem was unlike anything that had ever been seen on earth. It was a revelation that was made to the Jews, but it did not originate among them. The idea was not formed on earth, it was wrought out in heaven. It far transcended human conceptions and earthly instincts. We see all through the history of the Jews that God's thoughts were high above their thoughts as the heavens above the earth.

He was continually telling His covenant people that their history was included in a larger and grander history ; that in their seed all the families of the earth should be blessed. But the best and wisest of them were continually misunderstanding His intentions, and gauging them by their own narrow prejudices. If there was one thing especially opposed to the whole tenor of Jewish thought, it was Christ's command to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. And to us in the Christian Church, who have been placed on a more elevated standing-point, and have been educated by eighteen centuries of Christian experience, the range of the Divine regard seems as limited as ever. We are accustomed to hear about the strait gate and the narrow way and the few who find it ; and we make out of the saying a straitened faith and a narrow Gospel. To take an image from the garden instead of the seashore, our Christianity is too much like a trained tree, stretched flat along a trellised wall that looks to the south, fastened by nails and rags of party, Church creeds and ordinances. We do not believe much in a Christianity that grows like a standard freely all round, with branches, blossoms, and fruits stretched out in every direction—to the north as well as to the south, to the east as well as to the west. We fancy that there is no salvation out of the Church or the denomination to which we ourselves belong ; that the sun of God's favour shines only in the little circle of holy ground in which we ourselves move. The Kingdom of Heaven which even the

most charitable and hopeful picture to themselves is a miserably little one. We need, indeed, the vision of the vast heavenly city—with its twelve gates pointing to every part of the compass, and its multitude, which no man can number, out of every nation—to correct our narrow, selfish judgments of men, and to enlarge our hopes of the destiny of the race.

That vision is the highest illustration of the teaching of Scripture by precept and example, that God is no respecter of persons. It confirms what the Word of God uniformly declares, that the True Light lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and makes Himself known even in the midst of the most profound moral darkness, and keeps hold of the most unlikely human hearts by cords of a man unknown to us. God has everywhere, even in the vilest dens of ignorance and sin, heaven-sunned natures; men and women who keep by some blind love or instinct a portion of heaven in the midst of all that shrouds and shuts out heaven, who have some good thing towards God in their hearts, some gentle thing towards men in their conduct, by means of which God is purifying and drawing them to Himself. And we know that there are men and women who develop even from an unsound creed and corrupt circumstances a beautiful faith and a fragrant life—as the pure lily grows out of the vile mud, or the exquisite blossoms of a tropical orchid spring from roots adhering to the rotten trunk of a fallen tree. Christ proclaimed to the Jews, what He is still proclaiming to Christians, “Other sheep I

have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring." Out of every nation, out of every creed, out of every Church, out of every circumstance, Christ attracts faithful and loving hearts to Himself, as the magnet picks the particles of iron congenial to itself out of a heap of sand; and by diversities of belief, action, and experience He educates and prepares them for His everlasting fold. Some enter by one gate, some by another. Some are led forward out of their darkness to the gate; others are led backward from the light, to grope through their darkness to the gate, made blind that they may see. Some whose natural goodness hinders their grace, are brought through much tribulation to enter in by the door; and some whose life is evil are conducted by a discipline of love at once into the shining path of the just.

But while there are many modes of entrance into the heavenly city corresponding to the varying conditions and circumstances of men, there is only one way of salvation. The gates of the New Jerusalem, although twelve in number and placed on different sides, are nevertheless composed of the same material. Every several gate is of one pearl. The redeemed are not saved by the sect to which they belong, or the creed which they profess, or the circumstances by which they have been disciplined. They are saved by the one Name which is given under heaven, in whatever way they became acquainted with that Name. It is the one cross that draws all men to the Saviour. It is by the rugged, tear-stained, path to Calvary that

the Good Shepherd finds every lost sheep straying in the wilderness and brings it back to the fold. He accepts in every nation those who live up to the light that is given them, not for their own sakes, but through Jesus Christ our Lord. The folds are many, the flock is but one. There are many mansions, but one home. The gates of the city are numerous, but the mode of entrance is the same for all ; and the keys of death and of the eternal world hang at the girdle of Him who for Jew and Gentile, bond and free, for those who are afar off as well as for those who are near, is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

We are told that the gates are not shut day or night. They are not needed for defence or security like those of the earthly city, for the inhabitants dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in a sure dwelling and in a quiet resting-place. I remember seeing an ancient prehistoric tomb opened, in which a bronze sword broken in two lay beside the mouldering skeleton. That broken sword told an eloquent story of the wonderful change that had come over the faith of men. In former ages the dead were buried with their armour and swords ready for action ; for they fell asleep in the belief that in the next world they would rise up to renew the battles of this, and find their chief happiness in celebrating their victories over their foes. But when men broke the sword which they laid in the tomb by the side of its owner, it showed that they had begun to realize the blessed truth that in the future life there would be no need for the sword, for all the weary

warfare of earth would be done with for ever. Like the broken sword laid in the grave are the gates of the celestial city. Their existence reminds the inhabitants of a former condition of warfare and insecurity, while their open state shows the contrast between the old guarded fortress, exposed to continual alarms, and the present freedom and enlargement of the quiet habitation, defended only by the glory of God, as the wide border of Canaan was guarded by angel sentinels during the keeping of the solemn feasts. For beauty therefore, not for use, the heavenly city has its twelve gates. Useful things exhaust their meaning in their use. But beautiful things, like pearls and flowers, have an exhaustless significance, and are suggestive of a purer and higher world. The pearly gates are therefore beautiful instead of useful, or rather they have a higher use than their earthly prototypes had. They are for a symbolical purpose. Like the staves that bore the ark during the wilderness wanderings and were finally drawn out when the ark was brought into the temple, but not removed, being still kept in the most holy place, although no longer needed, for the sake of the precious memories and associations connected with them, the gates of the heavenly city, though no longer needed for defence against the enemy, are still preserved because of the deep lessons of Divine grace which they teach. All that might cause fear or a feeling of insecurity will be gone for ever; but all that will remind the redeemed of the way by which they had been led in the past, all that

will enhance the value of the Saviour's love and serve to deepen their own peace, will be kept before their minds by everlasting memorials.

2. And this brings me to the second point of consideration—the material of which the gates were composed. Every several gate was of one pearl. What a beautiful symbol this is ! Death is the gate by which every one must enter the heavenly city. And what a dark and gloomy appearance does it present to us on this earthly side ! The exit from this mortal life usually appears to us as an iron gate closing a vista of funereal cypresses. The way to it is strewn with faded flowers and withered leaves. It is corroded with rust ; it creaks miserably on its hinges ; it is carved with the skull and the cross-bones—emblems of our sad mortality. About it grows the deadly night-shade and the gloomy ivy. On the top is the urn of ashes draped with the weeper's towel ; and on the sides are the upturned torches whose flame has been extinguished. A chill that penetrates to the soul pervades all the place ; and the darkness that broods there perpetually has no ray of light to cheer it. Such is the dread picture which the end of this life presents to our imaginations. Sin has done everything possible to make the gate unsightly to poor creatures of sense. But how different is the entrance into the heavenly life ! We pass through the iron gate of death, and looking back from the other side, from the golden street of the celestial city, we see it transformed into a gate of pearl. All its gloom has disappeared ; all its relics of mortality

have vanished. It gleams before our eyes, purged by the heavenly eye-salve, in the soft tender radiance of one of the fairest and most precious objects that we know on earth. Beneath it flows the river of life ; over it waves the unchanging foliage—the ever-beautiful blossoms and the unfading fruits of the tree of life. Upon it is blazoned the armorial bearings of Christ, the crown of righteousness, beside whose splendour all earthly glories vanish. It is a triumphal arch for the passage of those who have been made more than conquerors through Him that loved them. How strange will be the transition to many of God's timid saints who are in bondage all their lifetime to the fear of death, who dread every allusion to it, and keep every object and association connected with it away from their eye and their mind ! Like Peter, led by an angel, they will pass forth from their narrow prison here in which they groaned, through the iron gate, and awake to find themselves in a trance of joy on the golden street of the New Jerusalem. Through darkness into light, through pain and weeping into everlasting joy, through fear and dread into a bright and blessed assurance for evermore ; the gate of iron changed into a gate of pearl ; that which was an object of the utmost abhorrence into an object of admiration unbounded ! Who has not seen the transfiguration of the dying, the gleam of the pearly gates shining upon the face growing pale and cold in death, like a winter sunbeam on a wreath of snow, and giving to the meanest countenance a dignity and beauty which it never knew before ! Who has not

heard the dying describe sights of exquisite beauty as the shades of darkness were gathering round the outer eye, and the inner eye was opening upon the unutterable wonders within the gates ! The cloud that overshadowed all their life is thus, at the gates of the west, becoming radiant with the glory that shall be revealed in them. Jesus Himself bowed His head and passed through the iron gate. He entered the region of death and all heaven entered with Him, and He annexed to the Kingdom of Life this dark outer realm which sin had estranged from the government of God ; and like a mightier Samson, carrying the gates of the prison that had held Him captive up the hill of God, the gates of pearl were opened wide at the angel-song of triumph—“ Lift up your heads, oh ! ye gates ; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors ; and the King of Glory shall come in.” Through the opening of the gates by His resurrection and ascension we have caught bright glimpses of the glorious things which He hath prepared for them that love Him ; we have seen the other side of death—the heavenly side—and a light has streamed down upon all this dark, death-stricken world that shall never more be lost out of it.

How much do these gates of pearl say to the redeemed souls that have passed through them ! In some far inland home you put your ear to the cool pink lips of a shell you had picked up from the ocean marge, and it murmurs to you of the warm ripples that curl on the creamy beach, and the soft winds that make a low speech tenderly sad on the lonely shore. The deep

voice of the unresting sea is in that strange far-away murmur. And so to the inner ear these gates of pearl, set up where there is no more sea, speak of the far-off vanished seas of earth, through whose dangers the redeemed escaped safe to land. In them is heard, as it were, deep calling unto deep. They tell of days when words like those which Jonah uttered from the depths of the sea come instinctively to the lips—"All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me"; and of stormy winds by which they were driven up and down in Adria, and they had no resource in the dark night and under the starless skies but to cast forth the anchor and wait for the morning. None can gaze upon these gates of pearl without thinking of the resistless, pitiless power, the impassive fixedness of purpose which makes the sea the most appropriate image of the calamities of life; or of that other aspect of it—the profound monotony, the absence of feature, the constant yet aimless and formless movement, the expression of deep melancholy, which so well illustrates the dreary hours of life, less tolerable even than its calamities, when nothing interests, and the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. None, too, can gaze upon the gates of pearl without being reminded of their wonderful deliverances, when the Lord "drew them out of great waters" and cheered them with a precious promise like a pearl found in the depth—"When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee." They cannot think of the storm without thinking of Him who came

through the storm to their help, and said to the waves within and without, "Peace, be still." The pearly gates are therefore the survivors of the seas that have fled, after their changes and storms had done their work in preparing the redeemed for their rest. Through these pearly gates they pass from the tempestuous sea of earth to the sea of glass before the throne, whose crystal purity no sin can stain, whose eternal calm no billow can ruffle. And as on the morning after a storm that has made many wrecks we walk along the shore, with the diamond sand sparkling in the sunshine, and the calm sea smiling under the cloudless heavens, so after life's night of storm the redeemed walk upon the sea of glass within the pearly gates and rejoice in everlasting sunshine.

How were these gates of pearl formed? The walls of the heavenly city are formed of jewels, each of which was crystallized in the dark depths of the mine, under the pressure of rocks, by igneous or aqueous agency. Rubies are derived from granite rocks; sapphires from metamorphic limestones. Quietly as they lie now around the eternal home, they were once exposed to forces which shook the earth to its foundations. They took their crimson hue from the devouring fire, and their sapphire gleam from the destructive flood. The coloured light that throbs imprisoned in their translucent walls, more intense because of its concentration, was focused in them by the throes of the earth during the long ages of its geological history. From sand and clay and coal, and other worthless or

repulsive substances, they were sublimed into their present beautiful forms and hues, as the blossoms of the mineral kingdom.

But the truth that what is fairest and most precious is obtained only through sore and long-continued struggle, which the jewelled walls witness to, is attested in a more tender and touching way by the gates of pearl. This substance is not of mineral but of animal formation. It is intermediate between the world of life and the world of death, between the lifeless matter which is the only thing that is permanent here, and the living matter which is continually changing. It has not the hardness of the diamond, which is farthest removed from life, nor the softness of the animal or vegetable cell, which is the most variable of all things. It is not produced by the dead inert earth, but by a living creature; and therefore it affords a better analogy of human nature than jasper and sapphire, emerald and amethyst. It represents more clearly and fully the free play of human life. A pearl is caused by the irritation of a minute parasite, or by the presence of a particle of sand or other extraneous matter accidentally introduced between the mantle and the shell of a species of mussel. The creature cannot get rid of it, and therefore to allay the irritation, covers it over with a series of layers of nacre or pearly matter. This smooth, round, shining object, which feels so soft and pleasant to the touch, which reflects the light in a tender way like snow or moonlight, which is so precious that it is deemed worthy of a place in the crown of a

monarch, is caused by a struggle with difficulties, an effort to overcome a trial; subliming by a wonderful alchemy, by the victorious power of life, into enduring patience a source of irritation, turning a worthless grain of sand into a pearl.

The fact therefore that the heavenly gates are made of a substance with such a remarkable history as this, irresistibly suggests the trials by which those who pass through them are made meet for their abundant entrance into the city. The gate through which they enter is that of purification and ennobling through suffering; the earthly element in their nature which is the cause of all their suffering transformed into the celestial through the fellowship of the sufferings of Him who is the pearl of great price. That gate speaks of temptations vanquished, of degrees of excellence reached through suffering, of a Divine beauty destined to supersede every mark of sorrow and be eternal. Who would have thought that out of the rough, broken, coarse-looking shell, as it appears on the outside, and by the labours and sufferings of a creature almost at the lowest point in the scale of life, whose structure is as simple as it can well be, without beauty of form or hue to attract, the glistening loveliness and preciousness of the oriental pearl could be produced! And who could have thought that out of the dark and sorrowful experiences of earth, purified by suffering, could have come the great white-robed multitude within the gates of pearl! To themselves while on earth it might have seemed wonderful grace that they should ever have

seen the faintest vision of the glory afar off. How then can they ever cease to adore the far more wonderful grace that through the grave itself—when they said to corruption, thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister—led them within the gates and established their feet upon the golden pavement, never more to go out!

When the North Bridge of Edinburgh was widened some years ago, they found in the arched vaults under the roadway the most wonderful caves of snow-white stalactites. The rain percolating through the roof carried with it the lime with which the stones were cemented, and by a slow and silent process carried on for many years, transformed the gloomy vaults into a fairy scene. Who would have suspected that under the common roadway, under the tread of the feet of toil and the busy traffic of the world, such a wonderful transformation was going on! And who would suppose that in the midst of this common every-day life of ours, the walls of an eternal city were growing up without noise of axe or hammer, our visible life being merely the scaffolding of it; that out of the common materials of our hard earthly experience there were being formed gates of pearl through which we shall enter into the heavenly city. Here, and now if at all, these walls and gates must for us be formed. Christ says, “I am the door.” By what sufferings and toils inconceivable was that pearly gate formed! He was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He passed through the reality of death that

only the shadow of it might remain to us. And we too must know the fellowship of His sufferings if we are to enter within the gates into the enjoyment of His glory. We must be dead with Him if we are to live with Him ; we must suffer with Him if we are to reign with Him. Through purity of soul alone can we enter the gates of purity into that place where nothing that defileth can enter.

The dweller in the far inland glen brings back a few shells to remind him amid the altogether dissimilar scenes of his daily life of his visit to the seashore ; the sailor brings home corals and other strange productions of the deep as memorials of the foreign lands where he has been. My own early home was far away from the sea, in the heart of the inland mountains ; and I remember well how my father and mother used, on their occasional visits to some seaside watering-place, to bring back a quantity of shells with them, and how delighted we children were with the strange objects, and the curious speculations regarding a world to us unknown they gave rise to. So I desire to bring from the land that is very far off into the midst of our worldly pursuits and enjoyments a few inspiring thoughts regarding the gates of pearl. Here we are walking upon the shore of the eternal sea, whose deep-voiced murmur is ever in our ears, breaking in at every pause in the music of life, and rising to fuller power in the solemn night, when all things else are hushed. Day by day the mighty deep creeps slowly up the shore and sweeps away the sand upon which we had erewhile

stood. One by one the grains of golden sand which we had gathered creep through our fingers back to the deep. One by one the bright pebbles or shells we had picked up are dropped in weariness and loss of interest. Many of the friends who walked with us have crossed over to the other side, and as the warm soft sand received ages ago the impress of some creature that crawled over it, and we cleave the dark bosom of the rock and see the immemorial print safe in its core, so our hearts retain the memory of the friends who vanished on the eternal shore, and of the days and things that are past. Our own day is far spent, and the shades of evening will soon fall. Soon our time too will come. But if we have the talisman of the Pearl of Great Price in our bosom, for whose sake we may well part with all our own goodly pearls, our eyes will be opened like those of the Seer of Patmos; and beyond the sunset and the darkness, and on the other side of the sea, we shall behold the battlements of the celestial city ; we shall trust the wave with Him who made the rolling deep a crystal pavement, and death itself will be to us only a warder beside a gate of pearl !

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CEDARS AND THE CANDLESTICKS.

“ And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.”—*GENESIS* iii. 8.

“ And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks One like unto the Son of Man.”
—*REVELATION* i. 12, 13.

THE book of Revelation is a mosaic, in which the previous parts of the Bible are brought together and formed into a new picture, illustrative of the fortunes of the Church and the world. By its constant use of the imagery of former books in new combinations, we are impressively taught how the future arises from and is shaped and conditioned by the past. The moulds of older history are used over again for the incidents of the present and the forecasts of the future. As Genesis is the book of beginnings, so Revelation is the book of completions, in which the copestone is placed upon the building, which, in the previous Scriptures, has been slowly constructed through the ages, and the capital laid on the pillar of truth whose foundation is seen in Eden, and whose top reaches to heaven.

I. Between the two revelations of God to man which meet us respectively at the commencement and at the close of the sacred Scriptures, we find the closest connection. He who appeared to our first parents walking among the trees of the garden, appeared in vision to the beloved disciple in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks in the Isle of Patmos. The two Divine manifestations were essentially the same, although they differed in outward form and circumstances. Between them there were connecting links. The experience of the exile on Horeb, for instance, was repeated in the case of the exile in Patmos. The same vision of the burning bush which appeared to Moses appeared to John in the vision of the seven golden candlesticks. The Son of Man associated Himself with the one symbol in the same way that He had associated Himself with the other. The occasion in both cases was similar. The Hebrew race and the Divine purpose contained in its history seemed on the eve of extinction under the severe pressure of the bondage in Egypt. The same race was threatened with dispersion over the face of the earth, and its civil and religious polity with destruction by the Roman power. And as the vision of the burning bush assured Moses that no fire of persecution could destroy His people, or prevent His purpose of mercy in their education and discipline from being carried out; so the vision of the golden candlesticks assured John that He who was in the midst of them would never suffer the light which they were privileged to hold forth among the nations to be extinguished.

The two symbols were witnesses that God's election of His covenant people had not been in vain ; that the original charter in virtue of which they were to conquer the earth and bless, alike under the form of Judaism and of Christianity, all the families of the earth, was not abrogated, but was to be fulfilled to the utmost. The burning bush was never to be extinguished, it was to become a candlestick ; and the fire of God's dealings with His people for their purification was to become a conspicuous light held aloft to lighten the whole world.

The same truth is still further illustrated by the fact that the vision of John in Patmos was based upon the Jewish tabernacle and temple. The candlesticks which the beloved disciple saw were like the one which Moses was commanded to place in the tabernacle, and the slightly different one which Solomon caused to be wrought when he built an house for the God of Israel. He who was banished from the earthly sanctuary—from the visible symbols—saw, like Moses on the Mount, the patterns of those things. He entered within the veil, and in the spirit beheld the realities of which the temple objects and services were the mere passing signs. The resemblance was dear to him, and it was doubtless meant to remind the followers of the Lord Jesus of a sacred past with which they were closely connected ; that though the former revelation was to cease, it was to appear in a higher form, which should nevertheless preserve the essential features and elements of what had been familiar to them. Separated outwardly from the solemnities of the ancient worship—from the priesthood,

the altars, the sacrifices, the festivals, the Hebrew Christians could still enjoy all that was most precious and enduring in the possessions of their race. In losing the temple and its services, they lost only the visible symbols of the true atonement for sin and of spiritual access to God ; and they found in the Christian Church a more satisfying communion with eternal things than their fathers had ever found in the tabernacle and temple.

And the modification in the old form which the Apostle beheld was itself full of significance. The single candlestick of pure gold, whose light illumined the holy place which was the pattern of the Church upon earth, appeared before John in the darkness and loneliness of his exile, multiplied into seven distinct candlesticks, as if each branch of the prototype had become a separate candlestick ; in token that the original Jewish Church, which was one—the Church of a single people—had differentiated into the Christian Church, which while one as to its unity of faith and love, is also many as regards its organization and individual life, the Church of all nations and peoples and tribes and tongues. The increase of lights, seven being the number of mystical completeness, indicated the enlargement of the conception of the Church, the removal of the narrow boundaries and restrictions which so long confined God's revelation to one people and one country. And the fact that the seven candlesticks were seen in vision, not in the holy place of the temple where the Jewish candlestick stood, not confined within the walls of the Jewish sanctuary, but in the open air, under the broad heavens and sur-

rounded by the wide sea, indicated that they had no more a merely limited Jewish, but a universal human signification. The candlestick was carried in triumph to Rome, when Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed; and the place of its captivity proved the scene of its freedom and enlargement. The Roman sword had, as it were, severed its seven branches from the main stem, and made of them the seven separate Churches of Asia, from which have come all the Churches of Christendom. He who had kindled the great light in Jerusalem, to be a witness of Himself and of His own presence with men, was henceforth to be known as the Light of the World —the true Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

And as the vision of Patmos was thus connected with the tabernacle and temple, and with the vision of Horeb, so we can trace them all back to the Adamic revelation, whose symbol was the tree of life in the midst of the garden. The sacred fire that appeared to Moses burnt in a bush of the desert; the candlesticks of the tabernacle and temple, and of the Apocalyptic vision, resembled a tree with its branches. And what is a tree? It is in reality a pillar of fire, a burning lamp—an embodiment of the same sunlight that burns in the fire on the hearth, or in the flame of the candlestick. It is the sunlight that enables the tree to build up its cells and fibres from the carbon of the atmosphere; and the burning of wood or coal in the household fire, or the consuming of the wick and the oil in the lamp, is just the liberation of the ancient sunlight that formed

the trees and forests of the past. The difference between the living tree and the dead fuel on the hearth or in the lamp, is that the fire in the one, owing to the conserving power of the vital principle, is burning without being consumed ; whereas in the other it is burning and consuming—reducing to dust and ashes, because of the absence of the vital conserving principle. Like Aaron's rod that budded, the mystical candlestick had buds, blossoms, and fruit. The bowls which contained the oil were shaped like an almond-nut, the knobs looked like the flower buds, and the carved flowers resembled the fully-expanded blossoms of the almond tree. This tree was selected as the pattern of the golden candlestick, and as that which yielded Aaron's miraculous rod, because it is the first to awaken from the sleep of winter, as its Hebrew name signifies. Its early bloom, coming in January before there is any green leaf on herb or tree, and the ground is naked and desolate, heralds the approach of spring. I remember being greatly struck with this circumstance among the ruins of the Palaces of the Cæsars at Rome. The soft clouds of almond bloom looked surpassingly lovely, clinging to the leafless trees that grew among the grey old ruins, and looking down upon the Arch of Titus on which, among the spoils of Jerusalem, the golden candlestick is sculptured, still retaining delicately cut in the Pentelic marble the almond ornaments on its shaft and branches. It was a symbol of the life of nature, rising in perpetual youth and beauty out of the decaying ruins of man's works. And so the Hebrew candlestick might be regarded as emblematical

of the life of the Church, being the first to awaken out of the wreck of human sin, exhibiting its beauties of holiness, and fruits of righteousness, while all around the world is wrapt in the winter sleep of spiritual torpor.

The golden candlestick was meant to be a reminiscence of that Eden where out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that was pleasant to the sight and good for food ; the tree of life also, in the midst of the garden. It was the symbol of the natural revelation of God, the primitive religion of unfallen man, when everything in nature spoke to him of God, and showed forth the Divine glory. The candlestick in the sanctuary was what the tree of life was in the garden ; it revealed in a typical form the deep spiritual things of God. The truths shadowed forth by the candlestick were indicated by the objects of the garden ; and the one revelation was but the unfolding of the other. We find, indeed, in the history of God's scheme of grace, several connecting links between the different dispensations which show their continuity, and mark successive stages in the evolution of Divine truth. The burning lamp and the smoking furnace that passed between the divided pieces of Abraham's sacrifice, the burning bush that appeared to Moses, the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night that guided the Israelites through the wilderness, Aaron's rod that budded in the holy place, the seven branched golden candlestick of the tabernacle and temple, the fiery furnace of Babylon, the vision of the olive trees and the candlestick of the prophet Zechariah, and the parable and miracle of the barren fig-tree of our

Lord in the Gospel—all these symbolical incidents and objects point back to the trees of Eden, and forward to the candlesticks of the seven Churches of Asia. They combine the two ideas of the tree and the light, the fire that vegetates harmlessly in the foliage and bloom of the summer tree—and the fire that blossoms destructively in the flame of the lamp and the furnace. They prepare the way for and are shadows cast before of the final revelation in the fulness of time. He who communed with our first parents among the trees of the garden appeared to Moses on the Mount, in the midst of a bush burning without being consumed—and manifested Himself to the last of the inspired witnesses at Patmos, in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks made in the form of the stem, branches, and flowers of a tree, preserving in this form the memory of the primitive revelation. He connected with every Theophany, the cherubim, the symbols of creation, indicating that the revelation affected nature as well as man. The cherubim that guarded the lost Eden for man—preserved it in its original purity and beauty for the purpose of restoring it to him when he should become worthy of it, the new Adam in the new Eden—were transferred to the tabernacle and appeared above the mercy-seat, beaten out of the same solid mass of gold—in token that the Mosaic dispensation was only a continuation of the Adamic—that our Creator became our Redeemer, and that our redemption was the fulfilling of a purpose deeply and mysteriously interwoven with the whole history of the world. The Lamb was slain from the

foundation of the world. That world was created by Christ, without whom was not anything made that was made, to be the theatre of redemption ; and the Gospel is the manifesting of the mystery which was hid from the foundation of the world.

2. But between the revelation of Eden and the revelation of Patmos there are some striking points of contrast. The revelation of Eden was given in circumstances of peace and happiness. The life of our first parents in their unfallen state was an idyllic one. They wandered among the soft bowers of the garden, plucking at will the rich clusters that hung within easy reach of their hand ; their only labour, the healthful, gentle exercise needed to dress and prune Nature's luxuriance. Nature was a faithful outward reflection of man's moral state. Its beauty and fruitfulness coincided with man's moral beauty and fruitfulness. Nature was in harmony with him whose will was in harmony with the great Will which expresses itself in the whole economy of the world. As naturally and freely as the trees grew and the flowers blossomed and the fruits ripened in Eden by the sweet law of growth—so naturally and freely did man in his innocent state display the beauties of holiness and produce the fruits of righteousness. His religious experience grew as the plants around him, without effort or struggle. What nature did unconsciously and willessly, he did consciously and willingly. God walked and talked with him among the trees in the garden face to face, as a man with his friend.

But the revelation of Patmos was amid widely different

circumstances. The symbol of it was not the tree that grew spontaneously by the laws of natural growth, but the candlestick wrought by human hands, with the sweat of the face. The gold of which it was composed was dug with toil and trouble from the mine, melted in the furnace, purified from its ore, and not cast into a mould, but beaten out of a solid piece with the hammer into the form in which it appeared. The workman who fashioned this most elaborate of all the vessels of the sanctuary must have pondered minutely over and bestowed immense labour and skill upon every part ; and yet the pattern and symmetry of the whole must have been clearly in his mind while from one solid mass of gold he beat out each shaft and floral ornamentation. The oil for the light was also beaten from the olive berries grown, gathered, and expressed by human toil and skill ; and the wick in like manner was a human manufacture made of the fine twined linen which formed part of the curtains of the tabernacle. The whole idea of the candlestick implied toil and trouble. And this is the great characteristic of the revelation of which it is the symbol. Everything connected with it indicates salvation from sin through toil and suffering. The first Adam in the unfallen Eden had only the pleasant labour of dressing and keeping the trees and flowers ; the second Adam was a carpenter, converting the trees in the sweat of His face into implements of toil. The cherubims at Eden, the symbols of creation, were associated with the flaming sword, the pains and sacrifices through which alone the joys of life can now be obtained ; and their

effigies on the mercy-seat in the tabernacle were sprinkled with the blood of atonement, in token that all creation felt the blow of man's fall, and groaneth and travaleth together in pain with him, waiting for its redemption. The burning lamp and the smoking furnace appeared to Abraham in the horror of the great darkness that had fallen upon him, and was a symbol of the mingled suffering and triumph, darkness and light, which were to characterize his own history and that of his descendants. The burning bush on Horeb appeared to Moses in his exile and daily toil, and spoke of the sorrowful experiences of the Hebrews in Egypt, with whose lot God had identified Himself.

Every image, every symbol and type in sacred Scripture, speaks of the curse of the ground and the sorrow of the soul which sin had brought into the world. This great factor is taken into account in all remedial schemes. The first promise to our race announces redemption through pain and toil and sorrow. The bruising of the serpent's head is to be accomplished only through the wounding of the victor's heel. God talked with Abraham among the oak trees of Mamre, as He talked with our first parents among the trees of Eden. It was the commencement of the new dispensation and covenant of grace, through which all the families of the earth were to be blessed ; and therefore God came to Abraham as He came to Adam before he fell, and converted by His promise the oak grove of Mamre in the wilderness into a beautiful reminiscence of the lost Eden. But it was not altogether the

Edenic state into which Abraham was brought back. It had traces of the curse of sin in it, which must ever defile and sadden even the most blessed experiences of the holiest saints in this world. Abraham was sitting at his tent door; and how suggestive was the tent of the pilgrim and stranger condition of man, and of the wilderness-life to which sin had banished him! Not in the cool of the day, as to Adam in Eden, did God appear to the patriarch, but in the burning noon—so expressive of the sweat of the face, the weariness and languor, and all the other trials of man's fallen condition.

The Levitical institutions disclose the painfulness of the covenant of grace in a most remarkable manner. Their limitations, their restrictions, their heavy burdens, their awful sanctions, their sacrifices of blood and death, all speak in the most impressive manner of the evil of sin and the costliness of the deliverance from it. And the life and death of our Saviour disclose this in a way still more solemn and emphatic. Before the incarnation He came in the noon-day heat to the tent-door of Abraham; and His appearance of humanity, His lassitude, His fatigue, His dust-stained feet and garments, His hunger and thirst, to which Abraham ministered, show to us in a most remarkable way how the Lord identified Himself with the lot of humanity, and made Himself a partner in man's new experience of toil and pain. And when He became incarnate in our nature and lived in our world, He took up our condition at the low, wretched point of privation and suffering to which sin had reduced it. He came not into a garden, but into a

wilderness. He became a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief. The triumphs of His grace were accomplished through the sorrows and toils of His humanity. His very miracles themselves show most conspicuously the pains and sufferings through which they were wrought. The trees of Eden in His case were converted into the cross of Calvary; and the glorious fiat of the first creation, "Let there be light, and there was light," into the awful cry of darkness and death—the birth pang of the new creation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And even after the triumphs of resurrection and glorification in heaven, He appeared ever and anon to favoured witnesses with the old tokens of suffering and death. To Saul He revealed Himself on the way to Damascus as "Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest." In the midst of the seven golden candlesticks the beloved disciple heard Him saying, "I am He that liveth and was dead." In the midst of the throne, John, through his tears, saw "a Lamb as it had been slain." And as the history of man's salvation is thus a record of toil and pain and sacrifice, so the Christian life in the individual and in the Church is developed only by laborious spiritual effort, by the sweat of the soul. It grows no longer as a tree, but as a building, a city of toil and suffering. How expressive, when viewed in this light, are the promises given to the seven Churches of Asia in connection with the overcoming of some easily besetting sin, some special evil. It is to him that overcometh the hindrance in himself and in the world, that God now gives to eat of the tree of life. It

is to the same Church—the Church of Ephesus—that Christ manifests Himself as “He that walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks,” and gives the promise, “To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God,” thus showing the intimate connection between the candlesticks of Patmos and the tree of life of Eden; how the latter is gained through the pains and toils and sacrifices indicated by the former.

3. Another point of contrast between the revelation of Patmos and the revelation of Eden is the clearness and fulness of the one, in comparison with the dimness and obscurity of the other. God talked with Adam not only among but through the medium of the trees of the garden, conveyed to him spiritual instruction by the objects and processes of nature around him. But whatever knowledge of spiritual truth he could thus glean from the hieroglyphics of the natural world, there was much in the character and relations of God which of necessity was unknown to him; there was much in the constitution of the world, in the wildernesses and deaths of nature, in the whole physical order of the earth which was set to the keynote of struggle, toil, and suffering, which, because of his childlike innocence, he could not understand. The revelation among the trees was therefore supplemented when he fell by the revelation among the candlesticks. Sin brought a terrible darkness upon the world and upon man, but the Divine light shone in the darkness. Man’s eyes were opened to know good and evil. The darkness of sin brought

out stars in heaven, formerly invisible ; showed to him a side of God's nature, His justice, and His mercy, which had not been formerly revealed ; disclosed to him powers in himself of endurance and courage, hope and faith, such as no dressing and keeping of the garden in Eden could ever have brought into play, and set forth a wonderful adaptation between a world whose objects and processes are memorials of struggle, pain, and death, and his own constitution, which has been so organized that his purest joys should spring out of his greatest sorrows, and his noblest gains out of his most utter sacrifices.

The witness of the trees of Eden to Adam was simple and intelligible. The tree of life was to him the symbol of all spiritual blessings. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the emblem of the whole moral law. Every time that he beheld the beauty of the tree of life he was reminded of the blessedness of obedience to God's will. The eating of its fruit was a natural sacrament in which he realized his communion with and tasted of the goodness of God. Every time that he looked upon the forbidden tree he was reminded of the penalties of disobedience, expulsion from God's presence, the loss of His favour, misery and death. Religion meant to him simply the knowledge, worship, and service of God as He was revealed by the objects and processes of nature ; and on these points nature could give him all the light that he needed. But we have sinned and fallen, and religion to us includes, besides these elements, repentance of sin and dependence upon

an atonement. Nature therefore cannot solve the awful doubts which arise in the human heart regarding the justice of God. Its testimony regarding His ways has so many apparent contradictions that we can get no sure and certain sound. Let us consider the lilies of the field, or the stars of heaven, or any other objects of nature, and they will return no answer to the momentous question of the unquiet conscience and the sin-stained soul, "How shall man be just with God?" We need therefore a special revelation. We need that He who at first commanded the light to shine out of darkness, should give us the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. God has given to us this special revelation, suited to our altered sinful state, in the economy of redemption. The candlesticks of the sanctuary disclose to us in the darkness what the trees of nature fail to teach. He who is in the midst of these candlesticks reveals the Father to us, and is Himself the way by which we may worship Him. In His cross we see the love that hates the sin and saves the sinner; how God can be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly who believe in Jesus.

In the tabernacle of nature many of the typical objects and processes were unintelligible to Adam, because of his sinless state. The wilderness was there waiting, but it had no meaning to him who was in Eden. The thorns were on the trees, but they suggested no analogy to him who had no thorns in his own heart and life; the thistles spread over the ground, but they conveyed no lessons regarding the sweat of the face to him

whose light labour was to dress and keep the garden. The leaves faded and the fruits fell, and the plants and animals died around him, but the fading and the death appeared to him, who knew nothing of death in his own soul, only as part of God's order in the world, mere phenomena of growth and progress. The whole system of things in the midst of which he lived was constituted with a view to redemption, but man had not the key to the mystery, which was hid from the foundation of the world, because as yet he needed not redemption. When man fell therefore God instituted the tabernacle and its services to explain to him the types of nature that were suitable to his case as a sinful and perishing mortal. The garden of Eden became the tent in the wilderness; and the trees in the midst of the garden, the golden candlestick in the sanctuary. The cherubim were engraved upon the veil and appeared above the mercy-seat, in order to unfold the true meaning of the cherubim of nature. The holiness of God, the sin of man, his need of forgiveness—and that forgiveness through the sufferings of another in his stead—these things were taught the ancient Hebrews by object-lessons. And the shadows of the law were clearly explained when the Gospel realities, which cast them before, appeared—when the veil that covered spiritual truths was rent in twain, and inarticulate symbols had given place to the Divine Word made manifest in the flesh.

The trees of Eden are Shechinah clouds, that conceal while they reveal the light that gives substance, shape, and colour to them. But in the candlestick the light

shines forth clear, naked, unveiled. In nature we see the back parts of God—the shadow cast by His presence; but in grace we behold the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Without the teaching of the True Light the revelation of the works would be an enigma; and apart from His Person their glories would be a dream. If He had not interpreted the voices of nature, the lilies of the field would have gone on preaching to us for ever in vain. The falling of the corn of wheat into the ground and dying, and through this sacrifice multiplying itself, would have been regarded as a mere natural occurrence, if He had not explained the reference which it had to the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The mere natural uses of the vine would alone have been regarded if He had not shown its higher use as the shadow of Himself. What innumerable lessons regarding the Kingdom of Heaven would have been lost to us if He had not revealed in His parables its connection with the objects of nature and of human economy. Seated beside Jacob's well He pointed to the living water; in the presence of bodily disease He manifested Himself as the spiritual Physician; at the grave of Lazarus He revealed Himself as the resurrection and the life. He imparted to us the blessed "second sight," enabling us to recognize under the masks of earth the angels of heaven. Every object in nature became in His hands significant of eternal truth. He showed that all the objects of creation were but uttering one mighty prophecy—all were but one united type of Him

who is the first-born of every creature. And it is a solemn thought that through toil and struggle, loss and death, this clearer and fuller revelation comes to us. The flame that burns in the candlestick is maintained at the expense of the wasting oil and the consuming wick. Through similar waste and consuming of heart, and brain, and life, comes the higher knowledge of the things that belong to our peace. The true light streams out to us through the rent veil of Christ's flesh. Only by passing through the thick darkness of the Cross can we enter into the light inaccessible in which God dwells everlastingly.

4. And now we come to the last point of contrast between the revelation of Eden and the revelation of Patmos, namely, the transitory nature of the one and the permanence of the other. God appeared to our first parents walking among the trees of the garden. These trees were in their very nature evanescent. They were mere passing forms, consolidated shadows and vapours that appeared for a little and then vanished away. What a tender and fragile growth is the grass ! How short-lived is the goodness of the flower of the field ! How fleeting the life of the largest and oldest patriarch of the forest, whose age has bridged across almost the whole of human history ! The dirge of the revelation of nature is, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof fadeth away." And it is so evanescent because nature is the mere scaffolding of grace ; and its decays and deaths, its toils and

struggles are only for the strengthening and unfolding of the spiritual and immortal. But, on the other hand, God in Christ appeared to the beloved disciple in Patmos in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks ; and these candlesticks were the symbols of the Word of the Lord which endureth for ever. The form and substance of these candlesticks indicated the imperishable nature of the revelation which they symbolized. They were all beaten out of solid gold—the most enduring of all earthly materials—the very pavement of heaven itself. They were carved with the figures of flowers and fruits, preserving the exquisite loveliness of the fading flowers and fruits of earth in an imperishable form. Thus they are appropriate emblems of the beauty and glory of the new creation of God, a creation, though new, yet founded as it were on the ruins of the old, fashioned of lasting and unfading materials, and yet combining all the beauty and glory of that which shall pass away. The trees of nature speak of fading leaves and falling blossoms and decaying fruits. The candlesticks of grace made in the form of a tree, and carved with blossoms and fruits, speak of leaves that shall never fade, of flowers that shall never die, and of fruits unto holiness, whose end is everlasting life. And the fact that the candlesticks preserve the form of the trees and the flowers of nature, indicates that nothing good shall be lost, but only restored in a higher form ; that the things of this world are all meant to prepare for the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. What is most precious and

vital in this transitory state of things has an enduring existence. The form perisheth, but the essence remaineth. The teaching, the enlargement of heart and mind, the purification and ennobling of the nature, the beauty and the glory, which the discipline and education of life have formed, remain and become the possession of the immortal soul for evermore.

And the light, too, of the candlesticks, which shines on these imperishable trees, and brings out the full beauty and glory of these unfading flowers and unwasting fruits, is an appropriate symbol of the crowning dispensation of God. Light was the first thing that was created. It is the principle of order and beauty. By means of it, chaos assumed shape and was clothed with varied hues. It is the essential element of life, health, growth, energy. Beyond its influence death and silence reign supreme. And as it thus preceded and forms all the things of earth, so it shall outlast them all. The forms of tree and flower in which the sunlight temporarily manifests itself, disappear, but the sunlight itself survives ; so all that in religion is merely instrumental—the use of sacraments, the exercise of self-denial and prayer, even faith in Christ—all these, which are but means, shall vanish, and the glorious end shall be the beatific vision of the Lamb in the midst of the throne, as the great everlasting Light of heaven. “The sun shall be no more thy light by day ; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee ; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.”

THE CORN.¹

THEY tell us that the homely corn that grows,
From russet stem and leaf, our daily bread,
Was once a lily ; which by various steps
Of menial work, became degraded thus.
It left its high-born sisters, in their robes
Of gorgeous idleness, to clothe itself
In this plain dress for common household use.
Its bright-hued petals, nectar-cup, and store
Of fragrance sweet, that insect lovers wooed,
It sacrificed ; and only wandering winds,
That have no sense of beauty or delight,
Now woo its sober blooms with heedless sighs.
But for this noble humbling of itself,
God has more highly honoured it, to be
The chief support of human beings, made
In His own image—rulers of the world.
And now bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh,
Its being mingles with our nature high ;
And through that union, it ascends our throne,
And gains in us the wondrous power, by which
The lilies wake to consciousness, and know
That they are beautiful, and find a speech,

¹ The corn along with all the grasses belongs to the second great division of the world of plants—the liliaceous order; and according to evolutionists is either a lily in its lowest stage of development, or a degraded form of the higher type ; the latter supposition being more probably its true history. Whatever foundation in reality it may have, the idea is a most beautiful and suggestive one.

In which their worship may go up to heaven,
And their wise lessons reach immortal souls,
To train them for their glorious destiny.
And greater honour still has God bestowed,
Choosing it at the Holy Feast, for type
Of His own Son, who laid aside His robes
Of glory, worn in the far heavenly home,
And girded with the linen towel His loins,
That He might be our servant, wash our feet,
And feed our souls with food convenient ;
Nay, more ! become through the last sacrifice,
Stripped not of costly robes, but costly life—
Himself the living bread, that nourishes
Unto eternal life a dying world.

CHAPTER XV.

A POTTERY MOUND.

“And He shall break it as the breaking of the potters’ vessel that is broken in pieces.”—ISAIAH xxx. 14.

ONE of the most curious objects in Rome is a huge artificial mound called Monte Testaccio. It stands near the gate of St. Paul’s, between the Aventine Hill and the Tiber, in the neighbourhood of the Protestant Cemetery and of the pyramid of Caius Cestius, and must have been one of the last objects upon which the Apostle Paul gazed as he was led to execution on the Ostian Road. It is a conspicuous object, being nearly one third of a mile in circumference, and about a hundred and fifty feet high, commanding from its top an extensive view of the most desolate and historical parts of the Eternal City, and the Campagna beyond. It is an easy task to climb it, for on different sides there are well-worn tracks from the base to the summit. The surface is covered in a few places with a little sprinkling of soil, and a sparse vegetation of grass and coarse weeds; but a close

examination reveals the remarkable fact that the mound is almost entirely composed of fragments of broken earthenware. Specimens of ancient pottery of all kinds may be found lying loosely on the surface of the heap, or by digging a little way into the mass. Pots employed in menial offices in the kitchen ; testae, from which the hill gets its name, or large jars of baked clay, employed by builders to diminish the weight of a dome, or the upper part of a wall, and huge amphoras that had contained the classic wines of antiquity, were all mingled indiscriminately together. Not one vessel was whole, nor could the broken pieces be united to form even the least important part of any vessel. I searched in vain for a partially complete specimen. It is an utter chaos of useless waste and rubbish. The mound, from the nature of its materials, is evidently of very ancient origin, nothing having been added to it since the early Christian ages ; but it must have taken many centuries to form it by slow accumulation.

Various theories have been proposed regarding it ; but the most plausible conjecture is that which connects it with the neighbouring Emporium or Custom House, where all the goods that were landed at the ancient quay of Rome were stored up for a time. It was the practice in those days to import not only wine and oil, and other fluids, but also corn and solid articles of food and of domestic use into the imperial city in earthenware jars for more convenient carriage. In the act of unloading, immense quantities of these fragile ves-

sels would be broken, and the fragments carried away to this spot, where they would accumulate in course of time into the huge heap which now astonishes every spectator. This explanation, however, is only a partial one ; for were it complete we should expect to find in the mound only vessels of one kind, fitted for storage purposes. But it contains, as I have said, fragments of the most varied assortment of vessels for household use and for ornamental and even for sepulchral purposes. And this fact proves that, although the broken jars of the Emporium may have formed the foundation of the mound and added considerably to its bulk, vast quantities of broken pottery from other quarters found their way to it afterwards, and it grew in size owing to the carelessness not only of the sailors at the port in unloading their vessels, but also of the slaves in the Roman households. It became, in fact, the general receptacle for the broken pottery of the whole city. That this was carefully collected into this one spot, instead of being thrown out anywhere, and that no other rubbish was allowed, except accidentally, to mingle with it, shows clearly that the heap was intended for some economical use. We have indeed reason to believe that this broken earthenware, ground into smaller fragments and pulverized, formed an ingredient in the famous Roman cement employed in the construction of buildings whose hardness and durability were proverbial.

But it is not in Rome only that such ancient mounds of broken pottery are found. Similar heaps of pot-

sherds, not on quite so large a scale, may be seen outside the walls of Alexandria and Cairo. The sites, indeed, of many ancient towns, especially those built of crude, sun-dried bricks, are often covered with great quantities of such fragments exposed to view and collected together by the disintegrating action of the weather upon the ruins, giving them the appearance of a deserted pottery rather than that of a town. Particoloured heaps of broken pottery are common in the neighbourhood of old villages and towns in Palestine. They are especially abundant in one or two places near Jerusalem. One of the gates of the city was called the Potter's Gate, opening upon the Valley of Hinnom to the south, because broken vessels of earthenware were carried through it to be thrown out beyond the walls, and also because it led to a place called the Potter's Field—the only spot in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem where potters still carry on their work. Heaps of rubbish in the valley immediately outside the recently discovered site of this gate have been found to consist almost exclusively of broken and very old pottery. The Potter's Field received afterwards the name of Aceldama, or Field of Blood, from its well-known association with the tragic fate of Judas; and it was purchased by the Jewish priests for the thirty pieces of silver, the price of blood, which Judas returned to them, as a burial place for strangers dying in the city during the great festivals. Large quantities of earth were taken away to Europe from this spot in the Middle Ages, under the impression that it had

the power of very rapidly consuming the dead bodies buried in it; and a part of the Campo Santo at Pisa, and of the crypt of the Capuchin Church at Rome, was formed of this sacred soil. It was even brought as far as Scotland; for a cargo of it intended for the old burying-place at Kilmun on the Clyde was wrecked off the shore, and gave in consequence to this romantic arm of the Frith the name of the Holy Loch.

As in ancient Rome, the broken pottery in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem was pounded into dust in order to be mixed with lime as a cement for building purposes. Much of the durability of the older structures is to be attributed to this cement. It was especially adapted for lining the inside of large underground artificial cisterns, which belonged to every dwelling, and collected the rain-water from the surface drainage, and stored it for use during the year. Many of these cisterns are of very ancient date, and are still in a fine state of preservation, although every other trace of man's work has perished in the places where they occur. The numerous aqueducts of the country, which belonged to an extensive and singularly thorough system of irrigation, were also plastered and made water-tight by this peculiar mortar. It has the valuable property of the Roman pozzolana, of hardening under water, becoming as firm and durable as the native rock to which it adheres. There are numerous specimens still in existence, between three and four thousand years old, upon which it would be as

difficult to make an impression with a chisel as upon the hardest granite in the quarry.

This cement was manufactured at a very early period. We have no record of a time when it was not in use. And it is still one of the most essential articles of production and commerce throughout Palestine. In that dry and parched land cisterns and aqueducts are constantly required ; and the preparation by the peasants of one of the most important ingredients in the cement for lining them is a familiar process which the traveller constantly witnesses in the towns and villages of Judæa. In the very same places, and by the very same simple methods employed by their ancestors three thousand years ago, broken pottery is still ground down in order to form this valuable cement. We read in the Bible of the process having been carried on in the Potter's Field in the Valley of Hinnom outside of the Potter's Gate at Jerusalem in the days of Isaiah and Jeremiah ; and in the very same place, every season still, the visitor may see the peasants carrying it on in exactly the same way ; a most striking example of the changelessness of Oriental customs and industries. Nothing can be more primitive than the process. The peasant collects the broken fragments of earthenware which he finds on the spot, or brings from some other place, into a little heap ; and, sitting down beside it, he rolls backwards and forwards over it a large round stone, until every fragment is broken into the smallest possible pieces and the whole mass is reduced to the state of fine powder suitable for his purpose. It is very inter-

esting to watch a process so primitive and archaic : the picturesque figure, and the curious bits of pottery over which he is bending—spouts, lips, sides, and bottoms of jars and vases and earthen bottles, some of a dull, reddish-brown colour, belonging to vessels in common use, and some richly glazed with bright colours and beautiful intricate patterns, belonging to some precious ornamental vase—all gleaming in the brilliant sunshine, making, along with the picturesque dress of the labourer, and the romantic setting of the white limestone rocks and dusky olive trees of the Valley of Hinnom, a picture dear to a painter's eye. The sight, too, is apt to awaken speculations as to the probable origin and history of these bits of pottery, and moral reflections as to the vanity of their end.

It could hardly be expected that a custom so ancient and so suggestive as this should have remained unutilized by the spiritual teachers of Israel to point a moral. It lent itself so easily and naturally to the peculiar didactic method of instruction which the Orientals affect, that it was early taken advantage of for this purpose. Throughout the Bible there are numerous direct and indirect allusions to it. In the second Psalm it is said of those who oppose the Messianic Kingdom of God that they shall be dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel ; and Isaiah foretells that a similar fate should happen to those who despised God's Word and placed their confidence in Egypt. They should be like one of those high mud walls—like the cob-walls of Devonshire, said to be derived from the East—which so

often decline from the perpendicular, and bulge out in different parts. “And he shall break it as the breaking of the potter’s vessel that is broken in pieces ; he shall not spare ; so that there shall not be found in the bursting of it a sherd to take fire from the hearth, or to take water withal out of the pot.” There is a still more striking allusion in the prophecies of Jeremiah, in the description of one of those remarkable acted parables which abound in the prophetic writings, and of which our Lord Himself made frequent use. The prophet is Divinely commanded to go down to a potter’s house, and watch the process of fashioning a vessel of clay upon the wheel ; and he is told that as the clay is plastic in the hands of the potter, so are the children of Israel in the hands of God; an image which the Apostle Paul afterwards employed in his Epistle to the Romans, and which has been so often grievously misinterpreted. Both passages, it may be remarked, refer exclusively to the temporal destiny of a nation, and have nothing to do with the question of the ultimate fate of individuals, which they have been supposed to involve. It is of the outward providential sphere of God’s action that both the prophet and the apostle are speaking, not of the inward spiritual relation of God to the personal soul, according to which its destiny is fixed for time and eternity. And this distinction should be carefully observed when the passages in question are explained. The nation in the hands of God is undoubtedly as clay in the hands of the potter, governed by fixed laws in its temporal political relations ; but this cannot be said in

the same sense of the individual, so far as his spiritual relations are concerned, for he enjoys a large measure of freedom, and his destiny is shaped to a large extent by his own conscious, willing action.

But leaving this subject, and passing on to the pictorial dramatic parable of the prophet, he is next commanded to get a potter's earthen bottle, and along with the oldest members of the priesthood and the people to go to the Valley of Hinnom, and there break the bottle in the sight of his companions. The place to which the prophet was commanded to go was the spot that, from time immemorial, had been devoted to the reception of broken pieces of pottery. It was the same part of the Valley of Hinnom, immediately outside the Potter's Gate in Jerusalem, where, to this very day, the peasant may be seen employed in crushing and grinding into dust the little heap of broken pottery which he has accumulated for the manufacture of the material used for mortar or cement. There, where a number of peasants were hard at work, passing their heavy stones over the little heap of pottery before them, and rousing the echoes of the desolate valley by the continuous sound of their blows, he was to hurl the earthenware vessel upon the rocky ground in the presence of the crowd ; and then, like the peasants beside him, he was to gird up his flowing garments, take from one of them his large grinding stone, and proceed to pound the broken sherds into smaller fragments, until at last it should be all reduced to powder. And when this solemn action was finished, he was to give the awful ex-

planation : " Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, even so will I break this people and this city." Surely no incident could be more picturesque than this : no method of instruction more graphic and telling ! The place in which it occurred was one well calculated to increase the impressiveness of the incident. It was on the top of a conspicuous rock overhanging the Valley of Hinnom, and commanding a fine view of the doomed city. All the associations of the place were peculiarly terrible. The Valley of Hinnom was the scene of some of the most debasing orgies of paganism. Altars smoked there to the gods of lust and cruelty in the near neighbourhood of God's holy shrine. Human sacrifices were there offered to Baal and Moloch. Tender children were made to pass through the sacred fires, and the cries of their torment were drowned by the drums of Tophet. In the days of Ahaz and Manasseh, all kinds of abominations were practised in the delirium of idolatry, and human nature was outraged to the very utmost. To stop these awful orgies, the pious Josiah sought to desecrate the valley by making it a charnel house, or a receptacle for the filth and garbage of the city. It became afterwards the chief burying-ground of the inhabitants, because there was no place elsewhere for the overflowing dead ; and the prophets, in denouncing the judgments of heaven upon the wickedness of the people, declared that the whole valley would be turned into a place of slaughter, where the carcases of the slain should form food for the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and the fire of God's wrath should consume them.

One can therefore easily understand, how, associated as this place was with the consummation of man's wickedness on the one hand, and of God's judgments on the other, it should have received from the Jews the infamous name of Ge-Hinnom or Gehenna, and be regarded as the appropriate earthly type of the place of eternal misery ; an awful symbolism to which our Lord, adopting on this point the current language of the time, attached the seal of His authority. All these associations could not fail to make Jeremiah's dramatic sermon in the Potter's Field one of the most solemn and impressive ever preached. There was surely, too, a singular appropriateness in the death of the arch-traitor in such a place of sinister memories. His tragical fate was an individual, but a most startling, illustration of the doom which the prophet foretold concerning the whole nation. Like a potter's vessel he was broken to pieces in the very field which had been purchased with the reward of his iniquity. And not long afterwards the inhabitants of the city, sharing in his guilt, were put to death by the Romans in the same way in the same place, until there was no room for the crosses on which they were crucified, and no wood to make them with.

Our Lord, in His parable of the wicked husbandmen, referred to the same striking image. He said, "Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same has become the head of the corner ? Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken ; but on whomsoever it shall fall it shall grind him to powder." The stone here alluded to was

obviously the stone with which the Jewish peasant shattered the broken pottery to pieces in the Valley of Hinnom. And we can easily see why it should have been rejected by the builders. It was a rough, roundish lump of hard rock, which no builder would naturally choose if he could find anything better for his purpose ; whose shape was not suitable for a well-built structure of squared stones, and whose hardness did not admit of its being easily chiselled into proper form. But while it did not seem suitable for a foundation-stone to the architect, its shape and hardness of material were admirably adapted for the use to which it was put. It could effectively grind broken pottery to powder. And how expressive in this light does the parable appear ! The builders wanted a squared, shapely stone, that could be put into their structure without any trouble, a stone that conformed to their preconceived ideas and rules, just as the Jews wanted a Messiah who should be really the product of the popular expectation, and should answer faithfully to his origin—a Messiah who should deliver them from the hated rule of the Romans, and establish an earthly sovereignty of more than Solomonic glory. And because Jesus did not conform to this anticipation, but, like a rude, roundish stone, unfit for their purposes —setting up a spiritual kingdom in men's hearts and in the world for which they had no desire—they rejected Him. And just as the stone that was thus deemed unfit for the purpose of the builder was fit for crushing and grinding pottery, so the Messiah, who was rejected as unsuitable to rule over the Jews, was qualified to punish

them for their sins. The rejected stone having become the head of the corner is itself the instrument of vengeance upon those who set it at nought.

There is a lighter and a more severe punishment threatened. Woe to those who shall fall upon this stone, who are offended by the Messiah's low estate, and will not have Him to reign over them because of His weakness and poverty ; for like an earthenware vessel that falls upon the stone of the pottery-crusher and is broken, so they will inflict by their conduct a grievous injury upon themselves : they shall suffer pain and loss. This sin the Jews have already committed, and this punishment they have already drawn upon themselves. But a far direr woe is in store for those upon whom the stone shall fall—who set themselves in final and self-conscious opposition to the Messiah ; for, just as the stone of the pottery-crusher is rolled backwards and forwards upon the broken potsherds, pounding them to the finest dust, so the finally impenitent shall be condemned to utter destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power. To reject Jesus as He appeared before them in the lowly guise of flesh and blood was like an earthenware vessel falling upon the stone of the pottery-crusher ; pain and loss and present harm would be suffered, but there might be recovery from such a fall ; the pot might be broken in pieces sufficiently large to allow them to be joined together and mended, and the vessel might be made useful again. But to be found thus rejecting Jesus when He should come again in His glory would be like

the stone of the pottery-crusher falling upon the broken earthenware—falling as from the height of heaven with fearful momentum, and by a mighty hand rolled backwards and forwards over the fragments, grinding them to powder, so that there could be no possibility of restoration. To reject Christ would ruin them as a nation ; but to be rejected by Him would destroy them utterly and for ever.

The last allusion to this peculiar image is in the promise given to the Church of Thyatira—“ And he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father.” The reference here is obviously to the second Psalm. The power conferred upon the Messiah will be delegated to all His victorious saints. When the true David is shepherd-king over all the earth, His people shall share His pastoral rule. They shall shepherd the nations with the shepherd’s club—that is, treat the nations who refuse to acknowledge the gentle sway of Jesus as the shepherd deals with the wild beasts or the robbers who seek to injure his flock. Not with an iron rod of oppression, after the manner of the tyrants of the earth, but with the sceptre of righteousness shall they exercise a sovereign and irresistible sway. Their rod shall only be upon ill-men, to resist and destroy evil. Too often, indeed, has the Church grasped at the promise, “ And he shall rule them with a rod of iron,” and forgotten the redeeming clause, “ as I have received of my Father”—which prescribes the spirit of meekness and righteousness—and the method of justice and mercy

in which the delegated power is to be exercised. And in consequence she has used her rod to increase instead of to relieve the misery and evil of the world ; and in the end the rod of oppression and cruelty which she has wrenched from the nations has been turned against her, and she has herself in turn been oppressed and cruelly used. But when she exercises the rod aright, in the spirit and after the manner of the Lord Jesus, and by virtue of the holy authority communicated by the Father, as the result of her own triumph over all the pride of life, and the lusts of the flesh, and the selfishness and injustices of the world ; when she maintains her own moral standing-ground inviolate ; then, in marvellous ways, does the world acknowledge her power—a power which shall subdue all its superstitions and corruptions, and make the nations confess that the Messiah's kingdom is, indeed, a blessed reality.

But the second part of the vivid representation brings up a different image altogether. There is an abrupt transition from the shepherd's to the pottery-crusher's work. It is not the idea of a potter's vessel struck by a shepherd's iron-faced club that is brought before us ; but the idea of the heap of broken pottery, over which the huge stone of the cement-manufacturer is made to pass repeatedly, until every fragment is ground to powder. This is a much more terrible idea. The potter's vessel struck by the shepherd's club would be broken to pieces more or less large ; but the vessel ground by the stone of the crusher would be shivered to the smallest atoms, so that there could be no restoration. And it is this

idea of the multitudinous fragments reduced together to a heap of powder that is conveyed by the words in the original. And what an impression of complete subjugation and final destruction does it produce ! As frail and perishable as the potter's earthenware vessel is the condition of the enemies of the Church. They can no more resist the Almighty power than the broken fragments of the potter's earthenware vessel can resist the heavy stone that is crushing them to dust. Such a fate has befallen all who have stood in the way of God's righteous administrations. The Jews who rejected Him were broken in pieces and dispersed like the dust of the shivered earthenware scattered by the wind. Heathen Rome, where the blood of His martyrs was shed, has long since been destroyed ; and all the other anti-Christian powers shall share the same doom when the Lord shall take unto Him His great power and reign. It is no jealous, capricious tyrant who inflicts this doom ; an Almighty Being who treats His creatures as the potter treats the clay which he makes without any reason, except his own capricious choice, either into a vessel of honour or into a vessel of dishonour, and who closes the mouths of those who question the justness of His procedure with the peremptory rebuke, " Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God ? " whose rights over His creatures are absolute. It is, on the contrary, a God of love, who acts in all things upon the fixed and immutable principles of righteousness, which comprehend in their bosom pity, patience, and mercy.

CHAPTER XVI.

APPLES OF SODOM.

“For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and of the fields of Gomorrah ; their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter.”—DEUT. xxxii. 32.

WHAT the apple of Sodom was we cannot tell with certainty. A hundred conjectures have been formed, and different kinds of fruit—the gourd of the colchicum, the *Solanum melongena*, and various other bitter substances growing in the Jordan valley and in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea—have been identified as this famous apple. By many it has been classed in the list of vulgar fables, kept up from age to age, like many other allusions inherently false, as Lord Bacon says, because they serve for good illustrations and help the poets to apt similitudes. There can be no doubt, however, that this strange fruit did actually exist ; for the accounts of various travellers, and the descriptions of the naturalists Strabo and Pliny, are too minute and circumstantial to permit us to believe that it was a creation of the imagination

alone, without any real objective existence in the natural world. Mr. Curzon, in his interesting work on the "Monasteries of the Levant," mentions that on one occasion, when travelling among the mountains to the east of the Dead Sea, on a remarkably sultry day, he and his companions saw before them the tempting sight of a fine plum-tree loaded with fresh plums, with a beautiful bloom upon them ; but when they came up to it, and snatched the plums from the branches and began to eat, instead of the cool delicious pulp which they expected, their mouths were filled with dry bitter dust, which they immediately sputtered out with loathing. Mr. Curzon brought home specimens of this object, which were given to the Linnæan Society, and by them described in their "Transactions" at the time. This, which may fairly be classed among the most curious productions of the Holy Land, was found, on scientific examination, to be a kind of gall-nut ; and it occurs in several places in the East, as well as on the plains of Troy, where Mr. Curzon afterwards found it. There can be little doubt that it is the famous Dead Sea fruit, or apple of Sodom. It grows on a kind of ilex or evergreen oak ; it is pear-shaped, about two inches long, of a rich dark purple colour, and comes to a point at the head ; it is marked around its circumference with a ring of little dots or shields like those on the under surface of the oak leaf.

The way in which it is produced is exceedingly curious. A little fly-like insect punctures the bark or

stem of the young shoots of the tree, and deposits its eggs in the wound, from which, in consequence, the sap issues and forms over them a roundish fruit-like excrescence, enclosing them in its interior. After a time, the eggs become white grubs, which undergo their transformations within the gall, and then eat their way through the substance of the interior to the skin, and finally escape, through a little hole which they have made, into the open air in the form of winged flies. The number and variety of these galls are very great. They are very common in this country. The shapes which they assume are often singular, and in many instances very beautiful. One of the most remarkable is the bedeguar gall, or the robin redbreast's pincushion, which looks like a tuft of bristling red moss growing on the extremity of a shoot of the wild rose, in the interior of which are numerous cells, each of which serves as a habitation for a larva. Perhaps the loveliest is the cherry gall, one of the commonest of our species, produced in great abundance on the under side of the oak leaf in July and August. It is a little less than the fruit after which it is named; perfectly round; at first pale green and semi-transparent, exhibiting a kind of granular structure like condensed honey, and afterwards becoming rosy on one side, the crimson spreading and deepening until the whole surface is at length dyed as red as a ripe cherry. Nothing can be prettier than an oak coppice covered with myriads of these tempting-looking fruits.

On the leaf of the maple another species of gall in-

sect gives rise to the numerous red spines which are well known to all. Upon many of our indigenous plants and trees a great variety of curious and interesting galls is formed, the history of which in many cases is still imperfect; but the oak-tree is more infested than all others. Upon it the nests of upwards of twenty different species of insects of this kind may be found. One attacks the young shoots, originating the well-known oak-apples; another develops flower-like leaves like a little brown artichoke on the buds; a third gives rise to a series of galls resembling a small bunch of red currants on the catkins; while every one is familiar with the little round oak-spangles which cover the under side of almost every leaf, consisting of a crowd of greenish or reddish hairs, as if they had been cut out of a piece of velvet, and looking so like the shields of a fern or the cups of a fungus that they were at one time supposed to belong to these orders. They change their colour with the growing and fading foliage, and during the winter they may be found on the red fallen leaves with the same rusty hue, the flies being developed from them in the following spring. A gall is produced on the willow called the *rose-willow*, which is like the oak artichoke, and consists of a cluster of short leaves arranged like the petals of a rose.

Some very extraordinary galls occur in foreign countries. I saw, in the neighbourhood of Nice, several elm-trees whose topmost branches were covered with large clusters of black pear-shaped bags, looking like

leaves that had been blackened and curled up by the action of fire. They contrasted very strikingly with the tender spring foliage sprouting by their side. These were the empty nests of a species of green aphid, in which the young had been hatched the preceding autumn. In Persia, China, and along the Levant this most remarkable gall used to be employed, under the name of "baizonges," to assist in extracting the scarlet dye from the cochineal insect. It contains a liquid formerly greatly in demand for curing wounds, under the name of "Oil of St. John." The astringent quality and viscosity of the fluid may have had some healing effects, and beneficially excluded the air from open wounds. But the most important of all the species is the common gall-nut of commerce, which grows on a kind of shrubby oak seldom exceeding six feet in height, found abundantly in the Levant. The galls are hard woody and heavy, about the size of a marble, usually round and studded with protuberances. The best are those which are gathered before the departure of the insect, because they are heavier and contain more of the tannin principle. They have a bluish colour; whereas those that have been left by the insect are whitish, light, and pierced by a little round hole. They are perfectly astringent, and are frequently employed in medicine and also in dyeing, while they form an essential ingredient in making ink. It is strange to think that to the nest of an insect we are indebted for the prime element of literature and of written thought. The words which I have

written owe their existence to the labours of this tiny manufacturer !

The insects which produce galls generally belong to the family of small flies called *Cynipidæ*. Their ovipositor is a kind of needle in a sheath like the sting of a bee when in repose, which can be extended to double the length of the insect itself. With this they bore into the tissues of plants and trees, and there deposit their eggs. The instinct which guides each species to select the particular plant or the particular part of the plant best adapted for its operations and for the reception of its larvæ, is one of the most remarkable examples of contrivance or design in nature. We see this very specially in the case of the rose-bedeguar, the grub of which lives in the curious structure all the winter, but whose hibernaculum is composed of close non-conducting moss-like bristles, and therefore affords a snug protection from the severity of the weather. This prospective wisdom, however, is not always infallible. Sometimes a case of perversion of instinct occurs. In order to escape from its prison when fully formed, the young insect has in many cases to traverse about half an inch of the walls of the gall-nut, and it has strength for that and no more. But it occasionally happens that two galls are fused together, and the little creature seeks to pierce its way out in the usual way, which happens in this case to be the point of junction between the two nuts. The substance to be traversed at this point is an inch and a half ; the insect has not strength

to accomplish this feat, and therefore perishes in the attempt.

Not the least extraordinary fact in the strange history of these products is the great variety of effects produced by apparently the same instruments and agencies. Out of the juices of the same oak are formed galls of very dissimilar appearance by the punctures of the different gall-flies. The cause of this diversity is still one of the unexplained mysteries of nature. Not only are the forms different, but the tissues are also different. In some the structure is soft and juicy; in others hard and woody outside, having within a layer of cellular tissue filled with starch grains, which afford food to the larvæ.

Galls are morbid growths, caused, as we have seen, by the puncture of a minute fly. The abnormal vital action that is set up by the irritation of the wound produces a change of organization, from which results a complete change in the external form and even in the internal substance of the part attacked. The cellular tissue swells, the parts which were naturally long become round, and starch, which is formed in those parts of a plant whose vital activity has been suspended, is deposited. There is a curious parallelism between the gall-nut and the acorn, the animal and the vegetable product. The gall-nut goes through the same changes with the acorn, remaining green as a simulated fruit through the summer, but assuming in autumn the russet hue of the foliage and fruit. In winter the acorn falls from the tree and is buried in the soil that it may produce the young sapling; in winter the gall-nut remains upon

the bough, but in spring the imprisoned germs of life within it are emancipated and take part in the active vitality of the world.

How are we to account for this beauty of form and perfection of structure in these morbid products, which almost rival the natural products developed in full accordance with the type of the plant? The oak-apple is in its own way as admirably constructed as the acorn, although it is nothing more than a mass of extravasated sap dried and consolidated by exposure to the atmosphere. What normal structure of the tree is more beautifully formed than the golden oak-spangle with which the under surface of every leaf is so richly jewelled? What cherry can be more tempting-looking than the apparently similar fruit which covers the young leaves of the oak-coppice in such luxuriant abundance? Is the natural moss that adorns the most beautiful of all the tribe—the moss-rose—more wonderful than the red bedeguar moss of the wild-rose, which is simply the nest of a colony of minute larvæ? The insects do not form these remarkable galls as the bee moulds its cell, or the wasp its nest, or the caterpillar its cocoon, or the bird its nest. They do not carry on the whole operation, as in these cases, from the beginning to the end: they simply puncture the leaf, or bud, or stem, deposit in the wound their eggs, and leave the plant to do the rest; so that there is no exercise of animal instinct in the formation of these curious galls beyond the initial impulse. How then are the galls so regular, so beautiful in structure and appear-

ance, so varied in their forms, and so admirably adapted for the purpose which they serve? The symmetry of all disease is a wide and as yet unexplained subject. The phenomenon seems one of those blind, unconscious operations of nature which irresistibly suggest the existence of a Conscious Mind working through them.

As the result of vegetable activity directed into an unusual channel by insect action, the pathology of galls strikingly illustrates the law of accommodation in nature. When a plant grows up in circumstances altogether favourable it attains its ideal form, and is beautiful and perfect, as God meant it to be; but when the circumstances are unfavourable—when it is marred by storm or drought, by insect blight or pressure of other objects—then it accommodates itself to the circumstances and develops an inferior form on a lower plane. An acorn that has fallen into a cleft of the rock springs up into the best representation of the ideal form which its untoward lot will allow; but it will not be like the magnificent tree that has sprung up from the acorn that has fallen into suitable soil and circumstances. A bean develops a finely-proportioned stem and beautiful leaves; but man comes and cuts off its first perfect growth, and from the original root or stem grow two other plants of an inferior type. An insect punctures the leaf-bud of an oak, and it has its legitimate growth spoiled by the operation: its tiny leaves are opened prematurely, and they become simple brown scales like those of an artichoke. All these are specimens, as it were, of God's after-work, which is not ideally beautiful, like the

first work, but the most beautiful in the altered circumstances.

The world abounds with these marred forms, the after-efforts of nature after the first have been spoiled. We see them in the animal as well as in the vegetable kingdom. The process of cicatrization—in which a new and highly vascular structure of a spongy appearance, called granulation, is produced, which gradually fills up a wound, and makes it appear like the rest of the surface—is an example in point. So also is the remarkable process of reparation in the case of a fractured bone, in which cartilage is formed in an unusual situation, and that cartilage is converted with unwonted rapidity into bone. It is only our familiarity with this fact, that living bodies are capable of repairing most of the injuries they may sustain, that takes away the true wonder of it; and as an argument of design it cannot be impugned by the suspicion that circumstances have determined the adaptation, because the adaptation itself shows that provision has been made for events of which it is uncertain whether they will ever occur. And this power of reparation shows how inherent in the organism is the typical idea, the definite pre-ordained plan upon which it is constructed. It is a part of the same mysterious process by which, in the usual structure developed naturally, the new series of particles take the pattern of those which they replace, and our own organs and tissues, though they are continually changing their substance, yet preserve their identity unimpaired. Every organism must work

out its own pattern, and it cannot overstep the laws of its form.

But in the effort to conform to this primitive pattern in the case of parts that are wounded, nature cannot attain to a complete identity of form or substance. The scar of a wound on the finger is not effaced, but grows as the body grows, and is clearly distinguishable to the end of life; and the substance with which the wound has been filled up and assimilated to the surrounding structure is of a lower kind with a lower energy. Vital action in parts that have been injured and then healed cannot rise to its specific elevation; the vitality of the part has undergone a certain degeneration, and material of an inferior order to the proper element of the part is produced, in which an inferior kind of action is alone possible. The lymph that is thrown out to heal the wound is the simple result of a deterioration of energy; just as the convergence of the nutritious juices of an oak-tree towards the wound caused by an insect for the introduction of its egg is a kind of hypertrophy of the tissues, in which starch, which is an inferior product, is deposited in the cells. It is an exceedingly curious fact that the animal and vegetable kingdoms, which have such remarkable correspondences in other respects, also resemble each other in the repairing of their wounds. The cicatrical tissue in plants as well as in animals does not acquire the full structure of that which it replaces. The new tissue is devoid of stomata or breathing-pores, and, as in animal scars, there are produced no sweat-glands or hair-follicles. But though the substance and

the vital action in the repaired parts of both plants and animals be thus inferior, the type of the general organism is retained. The gall-nut resembles the appearance and structure of the acorn; the abnormal robin redbreast pincushion, produced by an insect on a shoot of the wild-rose, is formed on the same model as the normal moss that appears on a variety of the cultivated rose. No new forces or laws appear in the organism, no new structure is produced in it under the circumstances which are described as disease. The phenomena of morbid action illustrate the character and relations of vital action. The destructive cancerous mass, that seems as if it were a parasite that had set up an independent life and structure of its own, is governed by the same laws of organic growth and activity which operate in the beneficial formation of the healthy organs of the body. All morbid structures conform to physiological types; all disease-produced cells have their patterns in the cells of healthy structure.

All these specimens of God's after-work—the sprouts of a pollarded willow, the various varieties of galls, the cicatrix of a wound, the callus formed by the union of the parts of a broken bone—are therefore beautiful on a lower plane than the original one. And among all such marred forms, which are beautiful not according to God's intention, but according to the limits imposed by the circumstances of the case, it is the province of art and poetry to find out the ideal of God's first work. And in this noble quest the standard of comparison is not wanting. For notwithstanding the numerous blights

and malformations that have appeared on the face of nature, there is still so much of God's primary beauty remaining in the world, that the mind has no difficulty in rising through them all to the ideal of which they so eloquently testify. Consequently, he who copies nature literally is a mere photographer, painting the blemishes with the excellences ; whereas he who endeavours from the marred to picture forth the unmarred form, to trace back the after-work which is an accommodation to the circumstances to the first work which expresses perfectly the idea of the Creator, is the true poet, the true artist. This too, in its own higher sphere, is the province of religion. Everywhere we see the effects of the curse in the marring and blighting of a world which God had pronounced to be very good. And the effects in the wilderness of nature are only a reflex of the still more disastrous effects in the wilderness of the human heart and of human life. But though man has departed from the law and the type of his being, and sought out many inventions of his own, he has not succeeded in altogether obliterating the original pattern of his life. The most lost of men still retain, though darkened and defaced, some lingering traces of that glory in which they were at first created. The soul still bears some lineaments of that Divine image with which it once was stamped, and makes its own darkness visible with the dying embers of its native fire. And it is because of this continuance of the primitive type, notwithstanding its degradation, that the salvation of man is possible. Had this been lost then all had been lost.

And in the work of redemption, this glorious after-work of God—an after-work only so far as its historic sequence is concerned, for redemption is no accident, but lay deep down in the intimate plans of the Creator from the beginning—we see the pattern of God in conformity with which all things are to be made new. The object of Christianity, by the power and example of the new life from above which had come into the world, is to remove all the disabilities, to restore all the marred and blighted forms of sin, and to realize the ideals of creation. Through the straitness of its nature, the bondage of necessity, and limitation of life imposed upon it, the world of animals and plants, when once it sinks below its primitive level, cannot again fully regain it. It must be content with the lower mould to which its unfavourable circumstances have reduced it. It cannot heal its wounds and injuries up to the original ideal. But it is widely different in the human world. Man is not fixed by fate; he has the glorious gift of liberty; and that power through the exercise of which he sinned and fell is the power through the exercise of which he recovers his position. Out of the possibility of sin arises the possibility of goodness. On the freedom of his will, which is the true image of God, the fore-ordaining, nay, even the possibility of the incarnation rested; and through the wondrous incarnation he who “declined on a range of lower feelings and a narrower heart” is lifted to a nobler position, and realizes a higher blessing than unfallen humanity could have known. Jesus came that he might have, not a bare life rescued from death, but a

more abundant life than he had in his state of innocence ; and through that wondrous coming he has grown, with all his sins and sorrows, to something which is nearer to God, nearer to the divine level. He is made capable, not of presenting the divine image merely, but of partaking of the divine nature, and of entering, as Adam never could have done, into all the high employments and holy fellowships of heaven.

This is the grand distinction of man, that which separates him at an immense distance from the rest of the creation—that while the after-work of God in the restoration of the lower world of plants and animals is only an accommodation—the best possible in the circumstances, a descent from the ideal—the after-work of God in the case of man is the attainment of a higher ideal than the first work. It is the redemption of free spirits which is God's final and most perfect work, for the accomplishment of which all things were made and are subordinated. His chiefest glory is not to be shown in the loveliness of animal and vegetable forms that have never been marred, but in the purity, the love, the spiritual greatness of beings who have sinned and fallen and lost His image ; not in the paradisiacal life of our first parents, exquisitely beautiful, lovely as a poet's dream or a memory of childhood's sunniest hour, although that vision may appear, but in the heavenly life to which, through the atoning work of the Saviour and the discipline of his own nature, man ultimately attains, beyond the wilderness life of transgression, and

beyond the river of death. Blessed beyond Adam, blessed beyond the angels of heaven, are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb. There through the loss of the divine image they have attained to the divine likeness ; and, created anew in Christ Jesus in the image and likeness of God, the spirits of just men are made *perfect*.

In the light of these reflections, what a deep significance attaches to the apples of Sodom ! As symbols of the fruits which sin produces, they are exceedingly striking. These fruits are galls—morbid, not natural, products—the result of the working of a foreign element, a poisonous principle in the human soul. The spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience gives rise to them. The life of the soul is perverted thereby from its original purpose ; and that which ought to have gone to develop the peaceable fruits of righteousness, in conformity with God's design, produces instead the evil works of the flesh. God made man upright—made the human tree good, and the fruit would have been the harmonious outcome of his nature had he continued in God's plan and order of his life ; but he sought out many inventions,—he corrupted his nature, so that the fruit which it yields is the suitable outcome of a corrupt and degenerate nature. But notwithstanding this perversion, this sad deviation from God's purpose, the morbid excrescences of sin retain the type of the normal fruits of righteousness. Evil is an imitation of good, only on a lower plane, in defect or excess. Sin cannot altogether depart from the pattern of holiness, and

fashion out something altogether new. Satan cannot originate ; he can only copy. Just as the galls of the oak resemble the normal products, so do the results of sin resemble the results of righteousness. And it is this likeness that constitutes their charm and power. As the parched and weary traveller is tempted by the apparently luscious fruits that hang on the solitary bush of the desert, having a striking resemblance to those which tasted so sweetly and refreshingly in his own northern land ; so the sinner in his thirst for happiness, amid the weariness and monotony of his daily life, is tempted by the pleasures of sin, that seem so substantial, so satisfying, so admirably adapted in every respect to meet the wants of his case. But with this superficial resemblance how wide and woful is the essential difference ! The oak-apple is only a bitter gall with a worm at its core. The delicious fruit when tasted turns out to be a nauseous excrescence which fills the mouth with ashes. How dreadful is the undoing of all who have eaten the apples of Sodom ! The first experience in Eden has been repeated continually ever since. The same false promise followed by the same cruel disappointment, which operated in the case of our first parents when the forbidden fruit, which they were told would make them as gods, brought them under the laws of suffering, toil, and death, have operated in the case of all their descendants. The type of the primeval sin and its punishment is the type upon which all the baleful and monstrous growth that has sprung from this bitter root has been developed.

But a wonderful thought is suggested here. It is very remarkable how a morbid product—an abnormal excrescence—should be made as beautiful as if it were the flower or the fruit of the plant upon which it occurs. The cherry-gall on the oak-leaf is as fair as the cherry itself, and the bedeguar-gall as the moss on the moss-rose. So, too, the pearl is the result of disease, caused by an irritation of the mantle of the mussel by the presence of the little *Distoma* parasite. God in this way overrules the perversions and irritations of evil chance, the abnormal products of disease, to add to the beauty of the natural world. Evil is not always ugly or chaotic—without form or void. It has a beauty and order of its own. It falls from a higher law to come under a lower one, which in its own degree is not less wonderful. Even the normal things of the world are, many of them, the result of weakness, poverty, and death. The legitimate blossom and fruit are produced from the axil of the leaf and stem—from the joint in the armour of the plant, which is equivalent to a wound in its side—or at the top of the stem, where the vital energy is feeblest and the amount of material for growth most scanty, and is the result of incipient decay. It is the dying plant alone that flowers and fruits. And just as the artichoke-gall of the oak and the rose-gall of the willow assume flower-like forms through the wound inflicted by an insect, so the normal blossom of every plant is made to assume its rounded clustered form and bright colour through the wound inflicted by nature's own hand. The same law that fashions the gall fashions

the blossom ; and they both owe their origin to wounds and weaknesses.

It must strike every thoughtful mind how much special beauty is conferred by imperfection and decay ; nay, "how necessary it is, even in order to be beautiful, that some objects should subserve their purpose inadequately." Has not the ruined abbey a more picturesque charm about it than the new church in which the worship of God is carried on ? Is not the peasant's thatched house, foul with damp, which totally fails to subserve its intended purpose, more gratifying to the artistic sense and fancy of the spectator than the solid, well-built cottage in its neighbourhood, which possesses all the modern appliances for health and comfort ? Does not the poet's eye rest with more instinctive pleasure upon a meandering stream than upon a stream that flows like a canal ? What object can be more beautiful artistically than an old wall, weather-stained, hoary with moss and lichen, mantled with ivy and weeds, shattered and full of breaches, through which the cattle leap into forbidden pastures ; more pleasing far in this ruinous condition than a straight strong wall of masonry, clean and firm, from which not a stone has fallen or broken out of line ? It is not the clump of noble oaks, with trunks as straight and well-formed as pillars, and richly rounded and perfect masses of foliage, which appeals to our love of the beautiful, so much as the cluster of aged trees, with gnarled boles and broken and ragged branches and scanty leaves, that are fast succumbing to the ravages of time ! All beauti-

ful things in nature are set to the same key-note of sorrow, suffering, and death ; and their beauty is developed through the suffering and death, through the imperfection and decay. To the ruin or abrasion of its shores the Mediterranean Sea owes the lovely blue of its waters ; and the bright azure of the summer skies is caused in large measure by the diffusion through them of the dust of life.

And this is the way of God in the human world. Evil is the minister of beauty. How often of our failures and disappointments, of the worm in the bud of our hopes, are made galls that seem almost as fair and satisfying, at least to the eye, as the fruits of success themselves would have been. The beauty is shown in these arrested and perverted growths, which, if allowed to develop and ripen in a natural way, would have bloomed in the flower and satisfied in the fruit. The most beautiful poems, which appear the appropriate fruit of a happy and prosperous life, are thus often mere galls, caused by the poison or blight of some secret sorrow or frustrated hope ; and the life that bears these apples of Sodom has learned in suffering what it taught in song. The tears of humanity have been turned into pearls, its wounds into fruits, its sighs into music. Men and women, like the trees of the forest, grow more beautiful with age and decadence ; and in the autumnal face is seen truer and higher loveliness than ever shone in its spring fairness and freshness. Human ruins, like architectural, are much more suggestive than perfect lives,—“richer and more various in the ideas and

emotions they call up." Many a body broken down by disease has become a shrine in which the sweetest worship is held ; the familiar daylight being charged with heavenly visions, and the common air turned into heavenly music. The saddest things of life are ever the most beautiful, and the most provocative of that mental activity which is itself a joy ; and if they suggest thoughts of the infinite life beyond, the sadness in them grows short and dim as a shadow at noon.

And still more in the highest world of all, the spiritual, in the things that concern the everlasting peace of man, we see the same beneficent principle at work. Out of the thorny curse of the ground God brings the purple blossom of the world's blessing. That sin which darkened the world has been made the means of its brightest illumination ; has brought to view attributes in the nature of God which neither man nor angel could ever otherwise have known. Out of the cross has flowered the salvation of the world ; and through the temptations and falls of individual men come forth their highest virtues. Man's divinest life is the result of his sorest pains. By the discipline of suffering, his sins and backslidings, his repentances and restorations are made the means of enabling him to rise to the full height of his Godlike stature and grow into the likeness and fellowship of God. The apples of Sodom may become by divine transforming grace the fruits of the tree of life in the midst of the heavenly paradise.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STONES BURIED IN THE JORDAN.

“ And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests which bare the ark of the covenant stood : and they are there unto this day.”—JOSHUA iv. 9.

In the extreme south of Italy there is an interesting river that washes the walls of the old town of Cosenza, the capital of Calabria, and flows through the valley with a considerable volume of water even in the driest weather. This river is called the Busento, and is famous as the site of Alaric’s grave. The king of the Goths with his army was advancing south through Italy for the invasion of Sicily, when he was suddenly overtaken with a violent fever which terminated fatally at Cosenza. By the enforced labour of the people around, the course of the river was diverted at the point where a tributary stream, called the Crati, falls into it, and its bed exposed. In this dry channel of the river they constructed a magnificent sepulchre which they adorned with the splendid spoils and trophies taken from the sack of Rome. There they laid in royal state the dead

body of the king ; and having closed the grave, they allowed the imprisoned waters to return to their native bed, and to flow over the spot. No one now can point out the exact place where Alaric lies, although its immediate neighbourhood is well known ; and the faithful river, which has jealously kept the secret confided to it for well nigh fifteen hundred years, ever murmurs as it flows past its solemn requiem for the mighty dead.

Two thousand years before this barbaric funeral, we read of another equally remarkable and far more significant, which took place in the bed of the Jordan. When the Israelites came from the wilderness to the banks of this river they found it in flood, for it was the spring-time of the year, and the snows of Hermon were melting in the warm sunshine into the sources of the sacred stream, which in consequence filled the whole of its bed up to the margin of the jungle, with which its nearer banks were fringed. But as the priests stood with the ark on their shoulders on the bank, ready to plunge in, depending upon God's promised help, the raging waters suddenly retreated up the gorge and piled themselves in great crystal walls at its upper end, leaving the whole bed of the river dry from north to south, through its long windings. The mass of the Israelites, men, women, and children, who were in the rear, quickly followed the priests, and safely crossed over to the other side. As a memorial of this wonderful passage, twelve stones were selected from the rocky bed of the river, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel ; and these were borne across before them on the shoulders of twelve

men, and planted on the upper terrace of the valley beyond the reach of the annual inundation. In this manner was formed the first sanctuary of the Holy Land, which was a circle of upright stones—like one of the so-called Druidical circles in which our pagan ancestors worshipped in our own country. The twelve stones of which it was composed continued for several generations to attract the reverence of the people, and the spot was chosen as the site of the tabernacle, where it remained till it was removed to Shiloh.

But besides this memorial which was set up on the western bank of the Jordan, there was another set up in the bed of the river itself. In the place where the feet of the priests who bore the ark of the covenant stood, in the centre of the channel, twelve stones like those which had been carried across to the opposite bank, were arranged probably in the same manner; and when the river, which had been temporarily driven backwards to allow the Israelites to cross, returned to its forsaken bed, its dark muddy waters flowed over the buried stones and hid them for ever from view. Thus there were two monuments of the miraculous passage of the Jordan taken from the materials of its own bed; one that gave rise to the sacred shrine of Gilgal, which was for a long time the appointed place of worship in the land; and another that was buried out of sight for ever in the muddy ooze of the deep rushing river. The sacred narrative tells us what were the purpose and meaning of the monument that stood on the dry land and was visible to every eye; but we have to find out

what were the purpose and meaning of the monument that was invisible beneath the waters of the river. Indeed, so great is the difficulty, that not a few able commentators have alleged that the text is an interpolation, and that in reality there was only one monument of the event erected. The reference to an apparently double memorial, they contend, is simply a continuation of the description of the manner in which God's commands were fulfilled, as "Thus Joshua set up the twelve stones which they had taken from the midst of the Jordan in the place where the feet of the priests which bore the ark of the covenant stood." Against this plausible theory, however, there is the formidable authority of the Septuagint translators, who have accepted the text as it is rendered in our version.

There can be no doubt that all the circumstances connected with the entrance of the Israelites into the Holy Land by the passage of the Jordan were meant to have a deeper significance than a mere natural one. For just as the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and their wanderings in the wilderness, while truly historical, may be regarded as a religious parable written for our instruction, so the circumstances connected with the entrance of the Israelites into Canaan, while truly historical, may be regarded as a pictorial representation of spiritual experiences. Look, for instance, at the fact that the Israelites were shut up by Providence to enter the Holy Land where they did. They attempted to enter by the open desert of the south-west directly from Egypt, but they failed, and were driven back, con-

demned by their unbelief to wander in the wilderness ; and, the old easy route Divinely forbidden, they had to skirt round the mountains on the right hand, and then to descend into the valley of the Jordan, and cross over that formidable river. The place where they entered the Holy Land is unique. There is no other place like it in the world. It is the deepest chasm on the surface of the earth—at a great depth below the level of the sea. Is there no spiritual significance in this remarkable fact that the Israelites should have entered the high mountain land of Palestine, not by a high mountain pass, but by the lowest part of it, the deepest defile on the face of the earth? Do we not see in this circumstance a symbol of the deep repentance and self-abasement which a people so sensual, so ignorant, required before they could be fitted to occupy the heights of worship in God's holy heritage?

Then look further at the fact that the time when the Israelites crossed the Jordan was the spring-time, which in Palestine is the commencement of the barley-harvest. We are told elsewhere in Scripture that the harvest is emblematical of the judgment. It was therefore a time of judgment when the Israelites crossed the river ; their past sins, their numerous rebellions, and outbursts of unbelief, deserved condemnation and punishment ; their iniquities rose up against them, and demanded their exclusion from the Land of Promise as unworthy. But God in His great mercy held back the waters of the Jordan, the waters of judgment and death, which would otherwise have

overwhelmed them, whilst His holy ark stood in the midst of the stream, and Israel crossed in safety ; a token surely that though He was angry with them, His anger had passed away, and He was about to give them double for all their sins. Look further still at the significant fact that when the Israelites had erected their first sanctuary on the other side of Jordan, on the soil of the Holy Land, which by this solemn act became their own inheritance, they were immediately circumcised, and thus consecrated anew to the Lord, made new creatures as it were from their birth to Him. So that we see in this incident, as well as in the circumstance that the older generation which had left Egypt all perished in the wilderness, and only their children entered the Holy Land, what we may regard as the origin and illustration of our Lord's profound saying, " Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

Seeing then that all the incidents and circumstances of the passage of the Israelites across the Jordan form a very focus of symbolism, we are surely warranted in looking for a spiritual significance in the burying of the memorial stones in the bed of the river. The Jordan was a boundary river, separating between the wilderness and the Promised Land. It flowed down to the dreary, lifeless solitude of the Dead Sea. Its waters, laden with mud, were dark and drumly, and concealed their bed and whatever they flowed over completely. Its course also was very rapid and impetuous. In all these respects it was a most expressive symbol to the Israel-

ites. The transition from the wilderness to Canaan was not made over continuous dry land; a water-boundary was interposed, through which they had to pass. And did not this teach them that in the passage from the wandering life of the desert to a settled home in the Land of Promise they were not to continue the same persons in the new circumstances that they had been in the old; but, on the contrary, were to undergo a moral change, a spiritual reformation. They were to be made a holy nation, in order to be fit occupants of the Holy Land. Their passage of the Jordan was therefore a baptism of repentance; the river at the entrance of the Holy Land, like the laver at the entrance of the tabernacle, afforded a bath of purification; and the memorial stones laid in the bed of the river, over which the waters, when they had safely crossed on dry land, returned, burying them for ever from sight, represented the fate which should have been theirs had God dealt with them according to their sins. There was a stone for each of the twelve tribes; and these twelve representative stones stood in the room of the whole people, and underwent the doom from which, by the mercy of God, they escaped. And just as the scape-goat carried away the sins of the people, confessed on its head, into the wilderness, into a land of forgetfulness, so the dark, muddy waters of the Jordan carried away the stones which represented the sins of the Israelites into the Dead Sea, there to be engulfed for ever.

In the former miraculous passage of the Red Sea,

which was an incident of a similar character and significance to this, the Egyptians who pursued them were drowned, when the Israelites escaped safely to the other side ; and their dead bodies, like the memorial stones placed in the bed of the Jordan, represented the death and burial of all that hindered their spiritual advancement and welfare. From their own dead selves, from their besetting sins and spiritual foes, they were now delivered. These all perished in the waters of forgetfulness ; never more should they rise up to condemn or annoy them ; and they were to emerge from their baptismal purification in the Jordan no more the slaves of sin, but the servants of God. While, on the other hand, the memorial stones erected on the opposite side of the river, like the altars which Abraham built in the places where God had appeared to him, and the pillar which Jacob set up at Bethel, clearly indicated the new consecration of their lives to God. It was an architectural vow—a token that they took possession of the Holy Land, not for selfish greed or aggrandisement, but for unselfish religious purposes, to subserve the high ends for themselves and mankind which God had in view in bringing them into it. Grateful for their deliverance—for all the wonderful way by which they had been led—they built their first temple of worship out of the stones which they had gathered from the bed of the river, which had proved to them the path of life, and not of death, and resolved that they would live no more unto themselves, but unto God.

Our Lord Himself—though purer than the purest

water—was baptised in the Jordan, and thus fulfilled all righteousness, not after the manner of God, but after the manner of man; made sin for us who knew no sin. In that baptism He passed from His obscure life of preparation to His public life of service. The rite was the gate through which He entered upon His path of warfare and sorrow. And as He crossed this boundary, or crisis of His life, there were experiences in His case too that corresponded with the two memorials connected with the passage of the Jordan by the Israelites. There was the identification of Himself with us as a sinner, who occupied our place and endured our penalty, indicated by the flowing of the waters of the Jordanic baptism over Him; and there was the personal consecration of Himself to His life of sacrifice, and the approval of it given by the audible voice of the Father, and the descent upon Him of the Holy Ghost like a dove.

All baptism is in a spiritual sense the crossing of a boundary. When a child is baptised it crosses a boundary between nature and grace—between ignorance and knowledge. And when in later life we are baptised with a spiritual baptism, born again of water and the Spirit, we cross the boundary between spiritual death and life—from the kingdom of Satan to that kingdom which is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Now the river of baptism is a river of death. In crossing it we die to sin and live to righteousness. In entering into the new life the old life perishes.

Through the death of the old man there is the resurrection of the new man. All that is connected with the old life of sin and unbelief is taken from us and carried down to the Dead Sea. The body of sin is drowned in the waters of forgiveness, and shall no more rise up against us. Like the stones in the bed of the Jordan, there is no resurrection for that which was connected with our former dead sinful selves. And how precious is the significance of the buried stones when looked at in this light! It is not a truth that pleases the intelligence by its ingenuity only; it is a truth that satisfies the heart by its suitableness to its wants. The Israelites could not have understood the full meaning of the symbolic rite to which they were parties. They had a partial comprehension of what the memorial stones placed in the bed of the Jordan indicated. But Christ has come, and the Spirit has taken the things that are Christ's and shown them to us; and now the Gospel sheds its light back upon the strange stones, and shows to us the link which was not seen under the law, between the waters that cleansed and the waters that overwhelmed in destructive judgment. It was not manifest to the Israelites what has been revealed to us by the death of Christ—that cleansing by means of death was God's appointed way. Jesus came not by water only but by water and blood. He came to purify men from their sins by His own blood; and Christian baptism, Christian conversion, combines the two things, judgment and life, death and resur-

rection, salvation through destruction. The sinner through grace passes into the kingdom of God ; but his old sinful life dies in the passage. He reckons himself as indeed dead unto sin, but alive unto God through faith ; just as the representative stones lay overwhelmed in the bed of the Jordan while the Israelites were safe on the other side. And hence the profound meaning of the words of the Apostle, "Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith by the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead." Washing and burial are thus combined ; for God's method of washing the sinner is through death—the death of His own Son, by whose grace, as typified by the waters of baptism, the believer has been raised—quickened into new life, purified, and consecrated to the service of God.

How comforting and reassuring is the thought that when, through faith in Christ, we have crossed from a state of nature to a state of grace—all our sins are cast into the sea of God's mercy. They are as completely buried out of sight as the stones in the ooze of the Jordan. The peace that is like a river and the righteousness that is like the waves of the sea flow over them. The Israelites indeed knew that the stones which were the memorials of their sinful, rebellious life in the wilderness lay in the bed of the river which they had crossed and left behind, although no trace of them was visible, and they had been carried by the swift current down to an unfathomable grave in the Dead Sea. And so with

our sins ; they are buried in the channel of Christ's pardoning grace, and can no more rise in judgment against us. But we know they are there still ; they have entered into our memory and into the substance of our being, and the recollection of them will follow us through all our life. Things cannot be obliterated or abolished ; they remain, and the record of them remains for ever. The memorial of Adam's transgression remained in the curse on the ground ; the memorial of Abraham's unbelieving laughter remained in the name of his son Isaac ; the memorial of Jacob's deceitfulness remained in his halting step ; the memorial of David's crime remained in the sword that hung suspended over his house ; and when Jesus finished the work which His Father had given Him to do, and passed into the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, neither did He leave behind the memorial of the sins which He bore for us. We see it still in the wounds of the cross which mark His glorified body in the midst of the throne—a lamb as it had been slain. And so we carry in the depths of our being the memorials of the sins which God has forgiven ; we bear their consequences, if they have been translated into outer deeds, in our lives. But while there is thus no obliteration of the past, while there is no Lethe of forgetfulness flowing for man on earth, and even in heaven we cannot forget the sins for which the Lord of glory was slain, and a sinner's experience must be ours for evermore ; still the waves of the river that maketh glad the city of our God flow over our sins, hide them from view, and separate

us from them by as broad a gulf as that which separates the dead from the living. Christ has expressly taken them upon Himself ; and in His death and resurrection we have the assurance that those who live unto Him need fear no condemnation. Let us therefore take out of the past what will help and not hinder us in the future. Let the memorial of sins buried out of sight, and separated from us by the river of God's pardoning mercy, deepen our penitence in the newness of life to which we have crossed over ; keep us more humble and watchful, and enable us to magnify the mercy that has forgiven much, in order that we may be stimulated to love much.

THE TWO WRITINGS.

IN awful majesty, veiled in dark clouds,
'Mid roar of thunder, lightning's vivid flash,
And earthquake shaking the eternal hills,
God wrote His law upon a granite stone,
Shaped from the rough, rude rock on Sinai's crest,
In letters which no change could weather out,
Which no soft moss could fill with tenderness,
Or lichen hoar subdue to mellow age.
Hard as the stone on which it was inscribed,
That law reigns throughout nature pitiless,
And says "The soul that sinneth it shall die!"
But when God came to earth in lowly form,
Without a cloud to veil His face with awe,
Gentle and peaceful, as the morning light

That shines upon the lily's dew-bent cup ;
And one poor sinner, crushed with shame and fear,
Was brought before Him by unfeeling men,
That He might give her sin its due award,
He stooped as if He saw and heard them not,
With His own thoughts of pity occupied ;
And with His finger in the fleeting dust,
That gathered on the temple's marble floor,
He wrote the law that she had broken there.
Inscribed in dust, the motes displaced, again
Would settle in the lines and fill them up ;
A careless passing foot would stamp them out ;
Or the same Hand that made them could efface
Their transient record of a moment's guilt.
Not on hard granite does He write our sins,
But in the dust from which frail man was formed,
And into which he soon returns again—
Which a mere touch or breath obliterates.
He knows the weakness of the human heart ;
And while no jot or tittle of His holy law,
Tho' heaven and earth should be dissolved in mist,
Can pass away until it be fulfilled—
His grace can pardon all iniquities,
And blot them out of His recording book.
Transferred from granite stone and temple floor,
To the dread tree on which He hung for us,
The handwriting that was against our sins
Was nailed ; His blood has washed the record clean.
And now nor God nor man can us accuse ;
We go in pardoned peace and sin no more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BUFFET-GAME.

“And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?”—
LUKE xxii. 64.

NOTHING is more remarkable than the persistency with which the out-door games of children recur season after season. No sooner do the days begin to lengthen than we hear in the lingering light of the quiet February afternoon the merry noise of the children, released from school, over their play—alike on the village green and in the streets of the large town. Old, familiar sports, that during the rest of the year had been laid aside and forgotten, are now again introduced, and carried on with fresh energy and enthusiasm. And the spectator, whose grey hairs and stiffened limbs and sense of dignity prevent him, even though his heart is young, from joining in the merry pastimes as he used in the far-off days to do, recognizes in the happy scene a reproduction of his own youthful experience. The games that he engaged in while a boy

are the same as his grandchildren now pursue with unabated interest. Year after year and generation after generation these games are perpetuated, as if exempt from the ordinary causes of human decay and forgetfulness. Fashion has no power over them. Whatever may be the changes in other respects in social habits and pursuits, however great may be the progress in knowledge, art, and social refinement, they change not. This, if we think deeply of it, is a curious circumstance. We are apt to fancy that the games of children originated in caprice, and that another caprice might at any time supersede them. Especially in an age of inventions like this, when everything is revolutionized, when school-books and methods of education are entirely changed, we might expect that some new suggestions, some fresh novelties would displace the familiar sports of children from their old position. But it is not so. They seem as suitable to the wants and tastes of the young people of the present day as they were to those of our youthful ancestors. Like the favourite stories of the nursery, they come with new power of adaptation to each generation. As the fathers and children alike begin the experiences of life in the same Eden of innocence and joy, so they each find there the same means of amusement and delightful exercise; and the world grows continuously young again over the same toys, sports, and story-books.

When we come to investigate this matter, to apply to it the scientific method which has been so fruitful of discoveries in other directions, we find that the games

which we see our children practise year after year are so firmly rooted in the regard of the young of each generation because they are the heirlooms of an immemorial antiquity. We can trace them far back to their original source among primitive races, in much the same way as the botanist traces his plants to their geographical centres of distribution. And as our common nursery tales, which once had a religious and social significance which in the course of long ages has entirely evaporated, when examined in this manner, have yielded striking evidences of the early condition and spread of mankind ; so our common children's games in the hands of men like Mr. Tylor have been used as ethnological arguments to show the connection in remote times of different races with each other and the various steps of their civilization. Many of the sports of children arise from the imitative faculty which is so strong in children everywhere. They will mimic in their play the serious work of grown-up people ; they will buy and sell in their little toy-shops, act the doctor and the lawyer to the life ; and an upturned chair will furnish to them a pulpit, from which they will imitate the services of the sanctuary, and preach a children's sermon to an audience that is, indeed, not far from the kingdom of heaven. And such mimic games may have sprung up of their own accord in different places. Our Lord's allusion to the Jewish children sitting in the market-place and acting alternately the part of a marriage and a funeral, and saying to their fellows, "We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced ;

we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented," is one that might be applicable to many a similar scene among our own children.

But there are other games that have something artificial and distinctive about them; and these can hardly have been invented independently by different races having no connection with each other. It is such special games that are full of archæological interest, and have much to tell us of our remote ancestry in the East. Battledore and shuttle-cock and kite-flying came from South-Eastern Asia, and a few centuries ago naturalized themselves all over Europe. The childish diversion of cat's-cradle, with its various representations of familiar objects, has been practised from the most remote times by the natives of New Zealand. Tennis—so tragically associated with the massacre of St. Bartholomew, during which Charles IX. divided his time between playing at this game and firing out of one of the palace windows upon the Huguenots—is one of the oldest sports in the world. It was known to the Greeks under the name of *sphairisis* and to the Romans as *pila*. The game of morra, so common in Naples and Rome, played between two persons by suddenly raising or compressing the fingers, and at the same instant guessing each at the number of the other, was familiar to the ancient Greeks and Romans, and has been perpetuated in the same region during a period of more than three thousand years. The analogous game of odd and even has descended to us from our remote Aryan ancestors, and is as old as

the time when the idea of the classification of numbers into the odd and even series first dawned upon the barbaric minds of pre-historic men.

A most remarkable example of the indefinite duration of children's sports is to be found in the game whose title is prefixed to this chapter. The buffet-game meets us for the first time in the extensive and beautifully decorated tombs of Beni-Hassan, a town in Middle Egypt formerly called Speos Artemidos. On the walls of these tombs, where many of the great officers of the earlier Egyptian dynasties were buried, are represented some of the most graphic details of archaic Egyptian life; among others, the famous scene of the arrival of the thirty-seven members of a tribe of Syrian people called the Aahmu, who visited Egypt during a famine in the time of Khnumhotep, Governor of Upper Egypt, and were long supposed to have been the Israelites under Jacob. Many of the ancient Egyptian games are depicted among these most interesting illuminations of the tomb. One particularly is sketched with life-like vividness. It represents a group of men standing with their clenched fists around a central figure, whose head is bent down so that he cannot see what the others are doing. They are evidently playing the buffet-game. One of them has just struck the blindfolded player in the middle, and they are asking him to tell which of them inflicted the blow. It is most interesting to see in this old world picture how thoroughly human nature is the same in all ages; and the association of the light amusement of an idle hour with the awful mysteries of the tomb

gives a most touching tenderness to the whole incident.

Among the ancient Greeks the sport under the name of *kolophismos*, from *kolophos*, a blow, was very popular. From them it passed on to the Romans, among whom it speedily established itself; and by them in turn it was handed on to the western countries which they had conquered. During the Middle Ages it was universally practised under the name of “Qui feri?” or “Who strikes?”—the person blindfolded having to guess by whom he had been hit and with which hand. Among the French the game has long been a great favourite; and the name of *mainchaude* which they have given to it conveys a humorous sense of the warm exercise of the hand which it calls forth when carried on with animation. In our country it is called *hot-cockles*, and is known to every child, especially in the southern parts. We thus see that the game has a wide range of distribution, and may be traced back to the very limits of historical antiquity. Whether Egypt was the place where it originated, or how long before the representation on the tomb of the Beni-Hassan it was practised, we cannot tell; but in that country we have the earliest trace of it, and in all likelihood it spread throughout Europe and Asia from that source. The form pictured in the Egyptian tombs seems to have been the primitive type of the game. But various modifications of it were contrived at a later time. Our own children are familiar with one variety, in which the principal figure is not blindfolded at all, but is simply struck by one who runs

away and is chased, and if overtaken becomes in his turn the pursuing figure. And *blind-man's-buff*, which is one of the most charming and enjoyable of our indoor amusements, is another development in which the additional features of pursuit and capture are introduced ; and the game, from being a sedentary, becomes an exceedingly active one. “*Blind-man's-buff*,” it may be remarked, was known to the ancient Greeks by the name of “*Muinda*,” and is supposed to have originated in the fable of Polyphemus—a cruel giant—son of Neptune, who had but one eye in the middle of his forehead, which Ulysses burnt out with a fire-brand, having first made him drunk. Of the game of “*hot-cockles*” it may be said that it used to be one of the pastimes played at funerals in some parts of Yorkshire. Could its history be traced far enough back, it might be found from various associations connected with it to be not a mere innocent game, but a dark religious rite connected with some primitive nature-worship.

Venerable and remarkable as these associations are, they are altogether lost sight of in the surpassing interest which its tragical connection with our Saviour’s last hours on earth imparts to the game. We are told that when Jesus was judged worthy of death in the palace of the high priest, a scene of disorder and brutal ferocity began worthy of the darkest orgies of paganism. The lowest menials of Caiaphas and the members of the Sanhedrim joined together in heaping upon Him all the abuse of vulgar spite and religious hatred. They spat in His face ; they smote Him with sticks ; they struck

Him with their clenched fists and their open palms. Dr. Farrar says that “in the fertility of their furious and hateful insolence they invented against Him a sort of game. Blindfolding His eyes, they hit Him again and again, with the repeated question, ‘Prophesy to us, O Messiah, who it is that smote thee.’” But we have seen that the sport in which they so basely indulged was no new thing—no invention of their own. It was an old game practised by their own innocent little children, and shamelessly perverted by them to hold up the Holy One of Israel to derision. Three of the Evangelists relate the incident in very nearly the same terms, except that in the accounts given by St. Matthew and St. Mark the words in the original which are translated “buffeted” are *ekolophisan* and *kolophizein*—derived from the name by which, as I have said, the buffet-game was known among the Greeks. The Jews doubtless obtained their knowledge of the game from the Egyptians; and the incident in the palace of Caiaphas irresistibly connects itself in our imaginations with the picture in the tomb of Beni-Hassan, that takes us back to the days of Jacob’s visit to Egypt.

We cannot but regard it as a significant circumstance that it was the Jews and not the Romans who compelled Jesus to take part in this humiliating sport. The Romans, as I have said, were well acquainted with the game; but they would have deemed it utterly out of place to introduce it on such an occasion. Everything connected with their judicial procedure was grave, orderly, and subdued to the majesty of law.

The vilest criminal was treated with consideration, and his case calmly and dispassionately investigated to the utmost. A dignified and impartial administration of justice was one of the noblest contributions by the Romans to the civilization of the world. We may therefore be sure that even the facile Pilate would not have allowed such a puerile exhibition to take place in his presence. Vacillating as he was between what he wished and what he dared to do, we are nevertheless struck with the immense moral difference between the procedure in his court and that in the court of our Lord's Jewish judges—Annas, Caiaphas, and Herod. No doubt the Roman soldiers took part in another childish game connected with our Lord's trial. They arrayed Him in the mimic robes, and placed in His hand and on His head the mock insignia of a king, and offered Him homage on bended knee, in derision of His pretensions to royalty. But they were instigated to this by Herod and his men-of-war. It was a method of throwing ridicule upon claims supposed to be unfounded more consonant with Jewish than Roman practice. All Orientals are children of nature—born dramatists, and take a passionate delight in histrionic displays. They would prefer to show by a spectacle appealing to the eye what they thought of a pretender, than by grave, argumentative investigation to prove him one.

Olshausen, however, takes a different view of the incident. He does not believe that such a violation of judicial decorum as would be involved in the buffet-

game could have happened in the actual presence of the Sanhedrim, the highest tribunal of the land. He imagines that the infamous scene took place after the retirement of the high priest and his council, when Jesus was left alone among the common crowd of servants and guards. But there is nothing in the historical sequence or spirit of the narrative to justify this supposition. On the contrary, everything goes to prove that the insolent acts with which the trial and condemnation of Jesus were so largely interspersed were performed when the council was actually sitting. The forward official who earned for himself the notoriety of having been the first to begin the illegal persecution, struck Jesus with the palm of his hand in the presence of the high priest, unreproved by that ruthless ecclesiastic. That act itself shows that the dignity of the court was not even externally preserved, and the horrible outburst of violence that followed was entirely in keeping with it; so that we may well believe that the appointed rulers of Israel witnessed, approved of, and even took part in the awful game—taking and giving license to do with Jesus as they liked.

How long the buffet-game lasted we know not. The Jews had to wait till the break of day before they could bring Jesus to the judgment-seat of Pilate. And during these miserable, lingering hours, the Man of Sorrows in all probability endured the insults and the violence of His self-constituted judges and their brutal band of servitors. What a contrast between His conduct and theirs ! How dignified His demeanour, how

noble His silence, how godlike His meekness ! In some respects it was the climax of His humiliation and shame. Life had no more humiliating experience to offer. The cross had its scoffing and its sneers in equal measure, but its very awfulness gave it the heroic grandeur which obliterated its meaner features. The men who mocked the Saviour's dying agonies were overwhelmed by the transcendent majesty of the scene, and they must have felt that their mockery was inappropriate. But here, in the hour of His condemnation, there was nothing to relieve the naked shame—nothing to dignify the occasion, except the demeanour of the Sufferer. All the circumstances were ignominious. The power of forbearance and self-restraint which our Saviour showed in the midst of this most humiliating pantomime seems greater than any called forth by His mightiest miracles. Such a picture of meek, uncomplaining patience—taking all these insults and mockeries calmly, as if He had fully expected them, and was quite prepared for them—the world has never seen. No response was made to the question of the buffeters, “Prophesy who is it that smote thee”; but the conduct of Jesus was a fulfilment to the very letter of the prophecies uttered long ages previously regarding Him : “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair ; I hid not my face from shame and spitting.” “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth : He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.” One

witness only gazed with loving and pitying eyes upon the mournful spectacle; and how deep and lasting was the impression produced upon him we learn from the touching words which he wrote long years afterwards in his exile : “I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and *patience* of Jesus Christ.”

All the circumstances and incidents connected with the death of our Lord are typical and representative. Sin flowered and fruited on the cross that its true nature might be shown. It culminated in the most deadly crime in the universe. And one of the most significant forms in which it acted itself out was that of mockery. And we cannot help seeing in this mockery something much more evil than the thoughtless iniquity of those who simply acted out their own depraved natural instincts. We feel that it was inspired by a malignant hatred—the hatred of a wronged and rejected benefactor. We recognize in the buffet-game, and all the revolting incidents connected with it, the intense dislike of a people who were not without visions and convictions of the truth, and who deliberately set themselves to despise what they were led by the most sacred obligations to reverence. It was appropriate that they should pervert an innocent game of childhood, associated with life’s simplest and brightest hours, in order to enhance the tragic features of the awful drama which they enacted—in order to express by the unhallowed perversion their scornful rejection of the holy child Jesus, who came to reveal

the Father to them. In this vile mimicry they were acting over again the part of Ishmael when he mocked and made sport of Isaac instead of sharing in the joy of the household ; and the apostle shows that this conduct was typical of the ridicule that should be heaped upon the righteous by the self-righteous in every age and nation. The whole circumstances of the buffet-game show how true were the Lord's own touching words regarding the Jews : "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me ;" how utterly wanting, in spite of all their long-continued divine training and teaching, they were in moral earnestness and the sense and love of truth ; how ripe as a nation they had become for rejection and destruction.

What made our Lord the subject of vulgar and profane sport to the Jews was the *seeming* incongruity between His lowly position and His lofty claims. It was the dwelling in His person of the fulness of the God-head in the tabernacle of our flesh, and the consequent conjunction in Him of the vast extremes of heaven and earth, that exposed Him to the misconception and ridicule of those who knew Him not. And it is the perception of a similar incongruous mixture of things *actually* unsuitable and disproportionate to each other that causes fools everywhere to make a mock at sin. There is a disruption in human nature ; the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and there is a law in the members that warreth against the law of the mind. It is in this antagonism and contrast that the source of the ludi-

crous lies—that light and frivolous minds find what gives them amusement in the weakest frailties of mankind. The wider the incongruity the more ridiculous does the case become in their eyes. Our Lord endured this contradiction of sinners against Himself that He might deliver us from it. He has brought back the unity of man's original nature, reconciled him to God and to himself, recreated the soul in the image of its Maker, and refashioned its tabernacle into a temple of the Holy Ghost—an habitation of God through the Spirit ; and thus the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ becomes the highest type of man, distinguished for the soberness of his mind, the dignity of his manner, and the consistency of his conduct, and the incongruities of a nature that is at variance with itself, and of a life that is the sport of discordant principles disappear, and with them the occasion of unhallowed mirth.

How little do we think when we see our innocent children engaged in a merry game appropriate to their age—which has come down to them from the remotest antiquity, and is widely spread over the world—that the Holy Child Jesus was in the most awful circumstances compelled to take part in it. May He whose suffering was greatly aggravated by it—who was wounded to the quick by the thorn, that they might have the beauty and fragrance of the blossom—purify their merry sports, make them healthful for the soul as well as for the body, and so fill their hearts with His own gentleness and love that they can never seek their pleasure in the pain of the meanest thing that lives ! And let us grown-up

men and women, who have laid aside childish things, think of the share that we ourselves have had in the awful game. We too have mocked at sin and have set the Saviour at naught. We see in our own bosoms the counterpart and likeness of the crime of the Jews. Our own personal guilt in connection with our Lord's humiliation and death is the great truth which the gospel strives to bring home to our hearts and consciences, but which we are so apt to repudiate. And it is from this great cardinal fact that our salvation springs. It was because Jesus was despised and rejected, not by the Jewish rulers or the Roman soldiers only, but by every sinner of mankind, that there is hope in His work of expiation for all. It is only when we realize our guilt in mocking Him that we can enjoy the blessings of His exaltation at the right hand of God, to which the ignominy of earth was the hard pathway. When the Spirit opens the eyes that Satan has blindfolded, and we recognize in the victim of our lawlessness the Saviour who loved us and gave Himself for us, then life ceases to be a dreary pastime in which the most sacred things are made light of, and becomes a glorious reality in which the things unseen and eternal are objects of our earnest desire and pursuit.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BLOOD OF THE PASCHAL LAMB.

“ For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians ; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the Lord will pass over the door, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.”—EXODUS xii. 23.

WE know that the Mosaic institutions had in the first instance a special adaptation to the common wants and circumstances of the Israelites. The law of food, the distinction made between clean and unclean animals, had its foundation in sanitary reasons ; it had a primary relation to the nature of the climate, and the best kind of nourishment adapted to the Jewish constitution in such a climate. Bodily health, vigour, and purity were doubtless the objects which the laws regarding cleanliness were meant first of all to subserve. And did we investigate all the Levitical laws with the same object in view, we should find in like manner that there was nothing arbitrary or capricious about them ; that there was a reason for them in the nature of things as well as in the scheme of grace. We may be sure therefore that the command of God to the Israelites, to

sprinkle their door-posts with the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the ever memorable night of the Exodus, was not an irrelevant sign, an accidental or capricious choice, for which any other thing would have done equally well. There must have been a fitness in the proceeding becoming an all-wise and all-gracious Providence, dealing with reasonable and intelligent creatures. Modern science has enabled us to discover such an adaptation.

Of late years numerous experiments have been made by scientific men in order to ascertain the origin of life. These experiments have been conducted in the interests of two opposite parties ; those who maintain that dead matter in certain favourable circumstances is capable itself of originating life, and those who hold that all life must spring from the germs of previous life. The advocates of the former doctrine, known as the doctrine of spontaneous generation, have not hitherto succeeded in proving their theory. Their experiments when more carefully repeated by their opponents have invariably turned out failures. Indeed, the result of experimentation has been entirely and exclusively on the side of those who argue that matter itself cannot in any circumstances originate life. So ubiquitous are the germs of life that it is almost impossible to imagine a spot altogether destitute of them. They are so difficult to get rid of in conducting any experiment requiring their exclusion, that after using the utmost precaution, and placing them in circumstances the most unfavourable, we cannot be quite sure that we have succeeded. In the earth, air, and water they are everywhere present.

Every room in every habitation is full of them ; and could we magnify these germs so as to make them visible, we should see the atmosphère loaded with myriads upon myriads of them, dancing up and down upon the currents that pervade it. They are ever ready to alight quick with life ; and they require the presence of only a few simple conditions to start into full vigorous growth. The great processes of fermentation and putrefaction are caused by them ; and many diseases and epidemics affecting both human beings and the animal and vegetable world have been traced to their rapid increase and luxuriant development, under certain favourable conditions. They perform a most important function in the economy of the world, taking to pieces effete substances that had once formed part of living organized beings, and so preparing the materials for entering into new combinations. And while they thus attack the dead, they also hasten the decay and dissolution of the weak and dying. This action is undoubtedly most useful in the lower world of plants and animals, leaving room for the development of strong and useful organisms. But in the higher world of man, where the same tendency of nature operates equally, other considerations outweigh the mere physical ones, and the medical man must step in and do what he can to prevent this tendency, and so save life. By the antiseptic mode of treatment—that is, by the careful exclusion of living germs from wounded or exposed surfaces—cures have been accomplished which some years ago would have been considered hopeless, and the most formidable operations may be

undertaken with some reasonable prospect of success.

In conducting experiments that have yielded such satisfactory results to the scientific theorist and the practical physician who has to fight against disease, all kinds of substances have been used in all possible conditions. One experiment is of special interest in connection with our present subject. Infusions of various materials—carrots, apples, and leaves of various plants—have been made, and placed in bent and rounded tubes, through which atmospheric air, that had been made to pass over pieces of pumice-stone steeped in fresh blood or in a solution of gelatine or sugar, was forcibly drawn by a special pump. It was invariably found that the infusion which had received into it the air that had passed over the blood, continued longer fresh and sweet than the infusions which had received their air through the sugar or gelatine. The fresh blood seems to have attracted the germs that were floating up and down in the air of the room more powerfully than the gum or the sugar, in spite of their adhesive properties, and thus prevented these germs more effectually from reaching the infusions in the glass tubes and setting up a process of putrefaction in them. The conclusion from this experiment was irresistible that fresh blood has a peculiar attraction for germs floating in the atmosphere, which cannot be accounted for on the mere ground of its glutinous character. It has long been well known that butchers and those who are engaged in the slaughter of animals, and are therefore

always more or less surrounded by fresh blood and have their persons and clothes stained with it, are among the healthiest classes in the community, and are singularly free from infectious diseases. In a plague, or pestilence, or epidemic, this class has always seemed to enjoy almost complete immunity. This fact has been known as a fact of observation for ages, but it is only within the last few years that the true reason of it has been ascertained.

Blood, if externally applied, attracts to itself from the atmosphere the germs of disease, and so secures immunity to the person upon whom it is placed. Professor Lister found that an undisturbed blood-clot has a special power of preventing the development of septic bacteria, owing to the fact that the white corpuscles still retain their vitality long after the blood has been shed from the body, and like all vital elements of a healthy living body, have the power of counteracting morbid germs. For these reasons we find a wonderful wisdom in the sanitary legislation of Moses regarding this substance. The Jewish lawgiver could have known nothing in those unscientific days about the living germs that are the cause of putrefaction in organic substances. This is the latest result of experiment and research in a remarkably scientific age. But he was Divinely inspired, and his code of legislation was communicated to him by that God who made all things, and therefore knew the secret of their properties. And there cannot be a more striking proof of the inspiration of the Mosaic legislation than just this fact

—that the primary reasons upon which it was founded could not have been known to Moses himself at the time, and have now only, after the lapse of three thousand years, been discovered by careful scientific research. In some respects this ancient legislation on sanitary matters is far superior to our boasted modern efforts in that direction. We find all our improvements anticipated, and carried out with a systematic faithfulness which leaves our sanitation boards far behind. In proof of the thoroughness of the Levitical laws of purity and food, the Jews can point to the superior healthiness of their nation during the whole period of its history. From an actuary's point of view, the life of a modern Jew—who still conforms to the Mosaic legislation, and who has inherited a constitution from a long line of ancestors bound by their very religion to use all precautions to preserve their health and purity—is of higher value than that of his Gentile neighbour, whose blood has been contaminated by long centuries of neglect.

There is every reason to believe that the last plague of Egypt, which destroyed all the first-born of the land, and gathered up in itself in increased intensity and meaning all the others, was some zymotic disease, or epidemic of a peculiarly deadly character. All the other plagues were natural to the land. As each was aimed at some peculiar feature of the wide-spread Egyptian idolatry, so each was in the line of the natural phenomena of the country. The conversion of the water of the Nile into blood was in accordance

with what happens naturally on rare occasions when the river is exceptionally low, and a vast growth of crimson microscopic plants takes place in consequence. The darkness that might be felt was caused doubtless by the khamsin—a storm of sand driven by the wind from the desert, every particle stinging the skin like a needle, and causing the people to stay indoors while it prevails. And so with all the others. Their supernatural character consisted in the coincidence of their occurrence with the Divine threatenings, in their intensification and portentous character, and in the special results which they accomplished. God economized the supernatural element in His working, and made use, as far as they could go, of the natural phenomena of the land to carry out His purposes ; just as He makes use in all His miracles of what is already in existence and available on the spot. We must consider the destroying angel as a personification of some natural but awful means of destruction which God employed to punish the Egyptians. The suddenness, the stealthy character of the visitation, giving no warning of its approach, coming in the stillness of the night, and leaving behind wailing and anguish unspeakable in every home throughout the land—all these circumstances irresistibly suggest the idea of some pestilence walking in darkness, of some terrible epidemic not unlike some of the famous plagues of the Middle Ages. It was a stupendous miracle ; but the miraculous element in it consisted in its severity, its indiscriminate incidence upon man and beast, and in its selection only of the

first-born of each creature. In these respects it differed from any natural pestilence recorded in history. But the destructive agency itself was only a portentous and well-timed employment for a moral purpose of a natural occurrence. It was like the smiting of Sennacherib's army, and the punishment of the murmurers among the Israelites in the wilderness, which were brought about by an extraordinary wielding in the hands of Omnipotence of natural causes. The Jewish Psalmist, referring to the event in the seventy-eighth Psalm, ascribes it to a sudden visitation of the plague : " He spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over unto the pestilence."

Now, if the death of the first-born in Egypt was caused by some natural epidemic or pestilence of this kind, Divinely employed to accomplish this particular purpose, its proximate cause would be the presence of morbific germs to an unusual degree in the atmosphere. The unhealthy conditions produced by the previous plagues, which were all linked together, would favour an undue development of these ; and the occurrence of a pestilence in such circumstances is what we should have naturally expected. By sprinkling the lintels and door-posts of the Israelites with the fresh blood of the paschal lamb, the morbific germs would be attracted and absorbed by the fluid, and so prevented from passing the threshold and reaching the inmates, who would thus enjoy immunity from the pestilence which devastated the homes of their enemies not similarly protected. This view of the case is still further strength-

ened by the command given to the Israelites to remain in their houses all night, and on no account to go out until the morning.

Such a conclusion does not eliminate in the least degree the supernatural from the event and reduce it to the level of an ordinary occurrence. The miraculous element still remains even though we are thus able to show that the destructive agent was a pestilence or a plague, and that the protecting blood served a prophylactic purpose, owing to the natural power which this fluid possesses to attract and absorb the deadly germs of an epidemic. There are circumstances in the event which can only be accounted for by the direct interposition of the Divine hand. We cannot attribute the safety which the Israelites enjoyed solely to the natural power of the blood any more than we can attribute the selection exclusively of the first born in every Egyptian home for destruction to the natural power of the pestilence. These were undoubtedly miraculous elements, and cannot be explained away. All that is meant to be inferred is simply that, in conformity with the principle of economy in miracles, the supernatural element took its departure from the natural destructive power of the pestilence and the natural conservative power of the blood. These were the fulcrums upon which the mighty lever of the miracle operated. And the more in this, as well as in every other miraculous occurrence, we find that God's procedure is based upon natural and necessary reasons, the more does it commend itself to us as the acting of a God of order, a God whose word and

works are bound together by a wonderful unity and harmony. It is the discovery of such harmonies between the Divine and the human, the spiritual and the natural, that approves the religion of the Bible to us as eminently truthful and reasonable.

Nor do these considerations detract from the fitness of the occurrence as a type of higher things in the sphere of grace. The fact that the incense of the Old Testament worship was composed of substances which modern science has proved to be eminently favourable to purifying and deodorizing the air, does not take away from the force of its spiritual significance, as a symbol of the prayers of God's people and the intercession of our great High Priest. Rather does this new information give a new appropriateness and force to the old symbol. Is it less appropriate that incense should have been used symbolically in the house of God, because we know how useful it is to purify the air of hot, close places in an Eastern climate, where a large number of people congregate together, and to neutralize the effluvia arising from the decomposition of animal matters in the sacrifices of the sanctuary? Is it less appropriate to plant flowers and shrubs in churchyards, by the graves of our dead, because we have found out in these days what our forefathers, who followed a mere blind sentiment—a natural sense of fitness—were ignorant of, viz., that shrubs and flowers actually do purify the air and disinfect the noxious influences that emanate from places of interment? And reasoning in a similar way, is the blood of the paschal

lamb, sprinkled upon the door-posts of the Israelites, less significant as a spiritual symbol, because we have found out recently that blood has a property which was previously unsuspected—the property of retaining and absorbing the germs of disease in the atmosphere? On the contrary, the natural discovery gives a new and deeper significance to the spiritual symbol. While the application of the blood of the paschal lamb was meant, in the first instance, to guard the Israelites from the pestilence by absorbing and retaining in itself morbid germs—that was not its only or its ultimate object and reference. It was meant to be a sign or type of our redemption through the application to our hearts and consciences of the blood of the Lamb of God slain for us. And if common blood is essentially cleansing—removing the effete particles of the body, and useful in certain refining processes of human manufacture—if it is so powerful to deodorize and render innocuous the evils of the natural world, how much more powerful must be the blood of the Lamb of God, without blemish or spot, to deodorize and render innocuous the evils of the spiritual world! The spiritual fact is thus based upon the natural; the health of the soul and the health of the body are intimately bound up together; and the laws that are designed to promote our highest welfare as immortal souls must take cognizance also of our welfare as passing and perishing creatures dwelling in mortal bodies.

The historical incident in Egypt is spiritually repeated in the experience of every Christian believer.

We are all exposed to the deadly plague of our own sins—which destroys soul and body for ever. Only the blood of Jesus Christ sprinkled upon our hearts and consciences can protect us. It was the fresh blood upon the door-posts of the Israelites that possessed the wonderful prophylactic virtue. When blood becomes old and dry it loses its power of counteracting the deadly influences of the atmosphere. Here, too, the spiritual is based upon the natural. The sacrifices of the Levitical law we find were continually renewed, because only fresh blood could be efficacious. In the nineteenth verse of the tenth chapter of Hebrews it is said—"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." The word *consecrated* is translated "new-made" in the margin; and the word *new* is a remarkable one, literally meaning "fresh-slain," being obviously intended to denote the difference between the blood of bulls and goats shed on the great day of atonement, which soon became old and stale, requiring therefore to be continually renewed—and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's atoning sacrifice, as of a lamb just slain, which continually retained its first efficacy and needed not to be repeated. Jesus died once for all; by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. But His sacrifice is as fresh in all its life-giving value and in all its cleansing power to-day as it was on the very day it was offered. The blood of Him who is the

same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, never grows old or stale or dry ; it never loses its virtue. And sheltered under that wonderful sign of grace there is now no condemnation unto us. There shall no evil befall us, neither shall any plague come nigh our dwelling.

It may be further remarked, in conclusion, that natural blood has not only a prophylactic power, but also acts as a passive agent in bringing about organization. When applied in an effused and coagulated form on a wounded surface, it will stimulate the vessels of the underlying parts to expand and to penetrate the substance of the clot, until, finally, it becomes transformed into vascular tissue. And as the clot of blood on the wound thus becomes organized, it acquires a defensive property against the septic elements that would produce putrefaction and disease. So in like manner the blood of Jesus Christ not only protects, but heals ; not only justifies, but sanctifies. The soul to which it is applied is not only saved from the pestilence, but is made spiritually vital, every whit whole, safe and sound ; so that it is able more and more to resist the devitalizing influences of a world full of the germs of spiritual disease.

CHAPTER XX.

UNTO GAZA, WHICH IS DESERT.

“Unto Gaza, which is desert.”—ACTS viii. 26.

WHEN Philip is introduced to us in the sacred narrative, we find him engaged in very interesting and promising work, in common with the apostles of Christ. His labours in Samaria and in other places in the neighbourhood had yielded the most wonderful results. The white fields ready unto harvest, of which our Lord spoke in striking prophetic terms after His interview with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob, had been reaped by St. Peter and himself, and many golden sheaves had been added to the barn of the Lord. There was much still to do in this place in the way of confirming the converts, and building them up on the foundation of their most precious faith, and in extending the knowledge of Gospel truth throughout the outlying districts which were Divinely prepared to receive it. Philip might justly have supposed that he would be allowed to remain in such a rich and suitable field until he had exhausted all its possibilities. And

yet he was Divinely summoned to abandon it, to leave his work there, and go away to the south-western region of Palestine, the old land of the Philistines—not to a larger sphere of usefulness, not to a scene of more crowded and varied human life, but “unto Gaza, which is desert.”

This place was on the very border-line, at the extreme south of the Holy Land, farthest removed from all the scenes and associations of Philip's ordinary life. The region round about was without towns or villages, lonely and desolate. It had been laid waste by the ravages of war ; and the encroachment of the drifting sands of the coast completed the ruin which man had begun. Formerly, the traveller going north from Egypt to Syria, or south from Syria to Egypt, had to pass through it ; and here provisions were laid in for the journey either way. But this route, owing to the lawless tribes roaming about ready to rob and maltreat the traveller, and to the destruction of the city of Gaza and the surrounding villages, had been abandoned ; and now the only objects that diversified the landscape were a few solitary palm-trees, and perhaps the dusky tent of a wandering desert Arab.

If Philip had reasoned about the Divine command, he would naturally have wondered much why he should be sent to such an out-of-the-way desert-place. What motive could there be for such an apparently arbitrary proceeding ? What good could he do in such a spot ? And yet, whatever his thoughts might have been, he immediately obeyed the Divine command. He left Samaria, and “went into the way that goeth down from

Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert." And as he did the will of God, the purpose of the commandment was made known to him. He found in the desert a more fruitful field of usefulness than he had found even in Samaria. Scientific men have shown us lately the wonderful arrangements by which insects and flowers are brought together, in order to carry out the ends of the vegetable world. The blossom is furnished with a nectary, or honey-cell, is painted with brilliant hues, enriched with fragrance, and shaped in a particular way, in order to attract and guide insects, by whose agency the plant may be fertilized and enabled to produce seed. More wonderful still are the providential arrangements by which God brings together the soul and the Saviour ; the means by which a man may be brought to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus and the man himself. So was it in the case before us. Just as, in the curious blossom of a common orchid, the insect is guided by the peculiar shape and colour of the blossom to the particular spot where it can carry out the higher purposes of the plant, and cannot chose any other path, so Philip was guided to the very place where he should meet the Ethiopian eunuch on his way home from Jerusalem. He was shut up in Providence to that one only course.

Some, who have an inadequate estimate of the value of a human soul, may say that it was not worth while to take Philip away from the great task of converting multitudes in Samaria for the purpose of saving a single benighted stranger in the southern desert. But such

persons have not so learned of Christ, who said, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" and who told His beautiful parable of the one lost sheep straying in the wilderness, for the sake of seeking and finding which the shepherd leaves his ninety and nine sheep in the fold, in order to impress upon men the blessed truth that it is not the will of the Father in heaven that one of the least of His little ones should perish.

But it was not the salvation of a single soul only that was involved. The Ethiopian eunuch was one of the greatest African dignitaries. He was next in rank to the Queen of Ethiopia; and the influence which the conversion of such a man to the Christian faith might be expected to exercise, would, in the nature of things, be immense and far-reaching. We know not as a matter of history what effect had actually been produced by the spiritual change upon his countrymen at the time. But tradition ascribes to him the conversion to his new faith of Candace and of many of her subjects. And if we include in the territory of ancient Ethiopia, the region now known as Abyssinia, it is possible that this single conversion may have prepared the way for the wonderful work which took place among the Ethiopians at a later period, when the whole nation renounced their heathen idolatries and became Christian, and the ancient prophecies of Scripture, that Ethiopia would yet lift her hands to God, were fulfilled. Valuable manuscripts of the Gospels and of the New Testament, that go back to an early period, have been found in the

monasteries of this country ; and the occupation of the land by our victorious army lately introduced to our notice the unique example of a people, savage and yet Christian, possessing among gross superstitions and vile social practices many of the religious customs and modes of worship of the early Christian Church. The superiority in religious faith and in all the arts of life which the Abyssinians enjoy over all the benighted children of the sun may be attributed in the first instance to the work of the Ethiopian eunuch. We may well believe therefore that it was not without adequate reason, even from the human point of view, that Philip was asked to abandon his populous and hopeful field of usefulness at Samaria and go down “unto Gaza, which is desert.” And just as afterwards the conversion of Lydia, who was compelled by a Divine impulse to leave her native place and go to Philippi, and who, after her conversion, returned to Thyatira, and founded, in all likelihood, the Christian Church there—a Church which afterwards formed that of Lyons, whose martyrs, during a terrible persecution, were the noblest in the annals of Christianity ; just as this wonderful event was brought about through St. Paul being obliged to abandon his large and important field of labour in Asia, and, at the instigation of the heavenly vision of the man of Macedonia, to go over into Europe, which seemed to him, in comparison, a desert place, so the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Palestine, who, on his return to his native country, founded in all likelihood the Christian Church there, was brought about through Philip being

obliged to leave his large and important field of labour at Samaria, and go down “unto Gaza, which is desert.” The Gospel was introduced into the African continent in much the same wonderful providential way that it was introduced into Europe.

It may be remarked that the scene of the Ethiopian eunuch’s conversion was admirably adapted for the purpose. We are told that when Jesus was about to cure the deaf and dumb man, He took him aside from the multitude ; and that when He was about to open the eyes of the man born blind, He took him by the hand and led him out of the town. And the significance of these incidents is obvious. Jesus isolated the man in both cases, not merely in order to avoid all show and ostentation, but that apart from the din and tumult and interruptions of the crowd, in solitude and silence the man himself might be made more receptive of deep and lasting impressions. And so was it with the Ethiopian eunuch. He had gone up from his own country to the Paschal feast at Jerusalem, to which thousands from different parts of the world had resorted. He had taken part in all the solemn services of the grandest of Jewish festivals. He had mingled in the crowd of worshippers. We have reason to believe that he was present at the Feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was manifested in the miraculous gift of tongues, and three thousand souls were converted in a single day. A stranger of rank and influence like him, a proselyte, moreover, to the Jewish faith, would have had opened up to him many opportunities of intercourse with

the chief priests and rulers of the city, and would receive from them much attention and consideration. He was in Jerusalem, when the most wonderful things that had ever taken place in the world—the life and death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth—and the marvellous miracles that had been wrought by His disciples were the common subjects of conversation, and divided the community in opinion. But he left the Holy City without any new insight into the faith which he professed, without any enlargement of his spiritual horizon. His mind was distracted and torn by doubts and difficulties. Doubtless his curiosity was deeply roused ; but he got no rest to his mind and heart. The atmosphere of the Holy City at such a time especially was unfavourable to the quiet meditation which clears the inner eye, develops the spiritual life, and opens the heart to receive the truth of God. Amid the noise and confusion inseparable from the presence of such an immense multitude, he could not gain sufficient calmness and leisure to get the full good of the holy associations by which he was surrounded, or a clear understanding of the wonderful things that had lately happened and were still happening in the city of his faith. But what he could not obtain in the crowded city he found in the lonely desert. Returning alone in his chariot, when he reached the border of the Holy Land he sought to beguile the way by reading a scroll of the prophecies of Isaiah. A spirit of inquiry had been stirred up within him by his visit to Jerusalem ; and here, in the solitude of the desert, with the great blue sky overhead, and the

wide, monotonous landscape around, he could freely indulge his memories and reflections, with nothing to distract his thoughts.

When Philip joined himself to him, he was fully prepared to receive his teaching ; his mind was made plastic and his heart sensitive to spiritual impressions. Shut out from the world, alone with God and the works of His hands, reduced to their primitive simplicity, both the eunuch and the Evangelist felt how dreadful was this desert-place. It was none other than the House of God and the gate of heaven. There the ladder was set up by which the benighted African climbed from his ignorance and darkness to the light and the joy of heaven. There the mystery of the burning bush was revealed to him ; and as he realized the great truth that He who died for his sins rose again for his justification, and ever lived to make intercession for him, he put off the shoes, as it were, from the feet of his soul, and felt that the place in which he stood was holy ground. He found there in the desert not only water by which he was baptized as a Christian, but in his own soul a well of water springing up into everlasting life. He realized in his own experience the precious word of promise contained in that very book of the prophet Isaiah which he read in his chariot : “ Neither let the eunuch say, Behold I am a dry tree. For thus saith the Lord unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant ; Even unto them will I give, in mine house and within my walls, a place and a name better

than of sons and of daughters ; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off."

This incident in the history of Philip the Evangelist is not unique, but representative. It is a type of what has often happened in the experience of God's people. It is an illustration of God's method of procedure still. The proper immediate application of the lesson which it teaches is to the case of ministers and evangelists, who, like Philip, are summoned from a larger and more important sphere of usefulness to one which, in comparison with it, may be called a desert. Our Lord Himself on one occasion left the busy, crowded cities and villages, where He was carrying on a most beneficent ministry of healing and teaching among multitudes that thronged Him wherever He went, to cross over the Sea of Galilee, to the lonely desert on the other side, in order that there He might cure the solitary demoniac who lived among the tombs ; who, in his turn, was the means of a wonderful spiritual awakening among the people of Decapolis, to whom he told what great things Jesus had done for him. Peter was sent from the large maritime city of Joppa, where he had ample scope to preach the gospel to persons from all parts of the world, in order to instruct a single Gentile family in the small and, in comparison, unimportant town of Cæsarea. And so God bids His servants still leave the ninety and nine in the fold, and, like Himself, go after the one lost sheep in the wilderness ; leave the crowded scene, and pass over to the other side, to some lonely, out-of-the-way place, where He Himself has prepared some soli-

tary individual, or family, or little flock, to receive benefit from the visit.

Numberless instances are on record of such providential leadings, and of the good that has resulted from them, not only to individuals, but also to communities and nations. We fancy that only in the crowd can good be done, that we need to get together large meetings, and an overflowing congregation, in order to produce a deep and widespread impression. But this is not always the case. Crowds have not always been helpful in the matter of healthy and sure progress. Not unfrequently, by their bustle and noise and distractions, they have placed hindrances in the way. A man has in a crowd no calmness of mind to think, but is swayed exclusively by the feelings of the moment. He loses his sense of individuality, which is the very first element of responsibility ; and may even lose his moral sensitiveness, and sanction words and deeds which, when alone, he would indignantly repudiate. The best work has always been done by the few, and not by the many. Our Lord's own best work, so to speak, was not done in crowds, but in the desert ; and the sayings of His that sink deepest into our hearts, and open up to us the grandest vistas into the eternal world, were uttered, not when thronged by the multitude, so that He had no room or time even to eat, but when conversing with a solitary woman, beside a well or near a tomb. The fickle crowds fell away from Him in His hour of need ; and only the solitary souls whom He called to Him one

by one from the sea-shore and the receipt of custom, and the desolated home, clung faithfully to Him to the last.

But we may give a wider application to the lesson. Whatever outward circumstance or inward motive induces us to leave the crowd and go down unto "Gaza, which is desert," for rest and meditation, we may be sure that it is the prompting of the angel of the Lord. We need to obey the Divine injunction more frequently, for our religious life is too social, exhibits too much of the common zoophyte type; it depends too much upon the excitement of meetings and associations, and is too often incapable of standing alone. It is urgently required, therefore, that not only in the enjoyment of the means of grace, but much more in their absence, we should work out our own salvation. We need more quiet, more reflection, more of the blessed solitude of prayer, in order that the heavenly may overshadow and shut out the earthly, and that we may hear the still, small voice of our Heavenly Father, which we are so apt to lose amid the tumults of the world and the distractions of society, even the most religious. If our careworn faces are to acquire and retain the "print of heaven," and our character and conduct the beauty of holiness, we should often retire from the world, leave the crowd, and "go down unto Gaza, which is desert."

It was at the *back side* of the mountain on which he fed his flock that the vision of the burning bush appeared to Moses. In the front he saw no door opened

in heaven ; the rocky horizon bounded his view and hemmed him in ; he saw no sight save the common features of the landscape, and heard no sound save the sigh of the wind and the rustle of the acacia. In the foreground of the mountain he was surrounded with nothing but nature in its ordinary mood ; and he himself was but a common shepherd engaged in the familiar task of feeding his flock on the scanty herbage around. But when he led his flock to the back side of the mountain, it was like passing behind the scenes to behold the unseen and eternal realities of the things seen and temporal. It was like going through the veil from the outer court of nature into the inner ; from the holy place where everything testifies of God's creation and providence into the most holy place where is the immediate and unveiled face of God. At the back side of the mountain the common air syllabled God's name, and the common bush revealed His presence, and the common sunshine that quivered on the leaves of the bush flamed with His glory. Heaven came down to earth. Moses became an inspired seer ; he was let into the secret of the sufferings of Israel, the meaning of God's discipline of them, and the design and end of their captivity. And the vision changed him from being a shepherd of sheep into being a shepherd of men. And so, too, if we are to behold something of the sight which Moses beheld, and to be changed in some measure as he was changed, we must often retire to the background of the mountain on which we live and labour. In the foreground we see only the

common sights and hear only the common sounds of the world. In the background we see the sights and hear the sounds of heaven. In the foreground we are buying and selling, spending and toiling, sorrowing and enjoying, amid things that perish in the using ; in the background we are brought into contact with the eternal archetypes of the passing things of time. And as the dull common earth becomes to us from this viewpoint the purple distance of a celestial land, so the vision works in us a wonderful transfiguration. Even in our ordinary speech how great is the difference between the quiet, low speech of the rural solitude and the sharp shrill dialect of the busy urban crowd. City-life, with its hard pavements and noisy carriages and Babel sounds, sharpens the pronunciation and gives an upward tendency to the vowels; while country-life in its grassy fields and mossy woodlands, hushing all noises, operates upon the phonetic system of the language and lowers the pitch of the voice to a gentle tone.

If we refuse to go voluntarily unto "Gaza, which is desert," God will providentially compel us. He will make a desert around us, so that under its bitter juniper-tree we may learn the true lessons of life, and realize the tenderness of the "Brother born for adversities." Many a closed lip and deaf ear have been cured by Jesus in the way "unto Gaza, which is desert." Many a short-sighted mortal, in his banishment, has seen a door opened in heaven, and beheld visions like the apocalypse of St. John in Patmos. Many a restless, fiery disposition has felt the infinite calmness of the

blue sky that broods over the waste, and been subdued by the awful silence and steadfast patience of the hills. Many a bitter, repulsive nature has joined the society of his fellow-creatures with garments smelling of myrrh, cassia, and aloes, the fragrant plants that grow only in the desert. The gain to individuals themselves and to society at large by the training of enforced loneliness cannot be over-estimated ; and wanting in the best and highest qualities is that man or woman to whom Christ does not say, at one period or other of life, “ Come ye yourselves apart into a desert-place, and rest awhile.”

“ FATHER EVEREST.”

THE summit of the Himalayan range *
Wears the resemblance of an aged man,
With head and shoulders bowed as if in prayer.
'Tis fitting that the highest point of earth
Should thus assume the lowly attitude
Of adoration, near Heaven's Great White Throne.
As earth's high-priest, clothed in a spotless robe
Of snow, unmelted since creation's dawn,
That awful peak enters within the veil
Of braided clouds, into the inmost shrine
Of nature's sanctuary inviolate,
Bearing the crimson blood of dying suns

* The highest point of Mount Everest, locally called “ Father Everest,” the loftiest mountain in the world, when clearly seen against the blue sky, presents a most startling resemblance to an old man praying.

Upon its brow, and on its bosom bare,
A dazzling breast-plate of snow-jewels, formed
From dews and rains that feed the trees and flowers,
And all the fair luxuriance below ;
Appearing thus before High Heaven, in room
Of the great world that clings unto its skirts—
A sacrifice of white and silent death—
That Heaven's rich blessings may descend to earth,
And burning plains be green with varied life.
What earth-throes vast, what ages fierce of storm,
Have perfected that mediatorial form ;
Sculptured its attitude sublime of prayer,
Against the stillness of the azure air ;
And calmed it to a patience infinite !
Youngest of peaks!* earth's last consummate work ;
Raised to that height supreme, above the hills
That stood there with the stars when time began ;
Above the wreck of seas and shores forgot.
The oft-attempted task to scale the heavens,
And reach the gods, accomplished in the end,
Not by defiance, but by humble prayer !

* The highest mountains of the world are the most recent, having been produced by geological causes of comparatively late occurrence.

CHAPTER XXI.

BEAUTY FOR ASHES.

“To appoint unto them that mourn—to give unto them beauty for ashes.”—ISAIAH lxi. 3.

THE well-known fable of the Phœnix is one that has been often truthfully enacted on our earth. Successive platforms of creation, with all their varied life and loveliness, have been reduced to ruin, and out of the wreck new life and beauty have emerged. The earth has reached its present perfection of form through repeated geological fires. The fair Eden, in the midst of which the history of the human race begins, was developed from the ashes of previous less lovely Edens. The soil of the earth is composed of the ashes of substances that have been oxidized, burned by the slow, soft caresses of the very air that breathed upon them—and whose gentle smile gave them colour and form. The building of the world was a process of burning, and its foundations were undoubtedly laid in flames. Its crust was originally like a burnt cinder. The rocks and the earths, the sands and the clays, the very seas them-

selves are, as it were, the ashes of a long-continued and universal conflagration. But during the long geological periods, by the silent agency of vegetable life working in unison with the sunshine, the work of the fire has been partially undone, and a considerable amount of combustible matter has been slowly rescued from the wreck of the first conflagration. Whatever now exists on the earth unburnt is owing to the wonderful co-operation of plant life and solar light. These two forces have given to us all the beauty which now spreads over the ashes of the world.

Nay, the very ashes of the earth themselves contribute in the most marvellous manner to its beauty. How much does the scenery of our world owe to its picturesque rocks, and sandy deserts, and lonely seas, which, as we have seen, are but the ashes of the primæval fire ! What wonderful beauty God has brought out of water ! It is strange to think of water being the ashes of a conflagration—the snow on the mountain-top, the foam of the waterfall, the cloud of glory in the heavens, the dew-drop in the eye of the daisy. Without the intervention of vegetable life at all, God has thus directly, from the objects themselves, given beauty for ashes. He might have made these ashes of our globe as repulsive to the sight as the blackened relics of forest and plain, over which the prairie fire has swept, while, at the same time, they might have subserved all their ends and uses. But He has, instead, clothed them with incomparable majesty and loveliness, so that they minister most richly to our admiration and enjoyment ; and

some of the noblest conceptions of the human mind have been borrowed from their varied chambers of imagery. Even the mourning dress of our mother earth —the dress which she assumes in her lonely wastes when she strips off the outer floral coat of many colours, and is seen arrayed only in her sackcloth and ashes—is beautiful and becoming to her. But she acquires an added loveliness when, in her fertile fields and luxuriant forests, she clothes herself with her garments of praise—her emerald robe of vegetation—the common household dress in which she waits upon the daily wants of her creatures, and contributes most to the joy of her noblest sons. And, most marvellous paradox of all, she has made all life—vegetable, animal, and human—to be sustained by combustion !

And like the old processes of nature are the new ones that take place still. In the beautiful balancing of creation the same recuperative process follows every such loss. Out of the ashes of the local conflagration that has reduced the fields and forests to one uniform blackened waste, come forth the beauty of greener fields and forests of species unknown there before. Very strikingly is this seen on the dry hillsides of the Sierra Nevada, covered with dense scrub which is often swept by fire. All the trees in the groves of pine that grow on these hillsides, however unequal in size, as a recent writer has strikingly shown, are of the same age, and the cones which they produce are persistent, and never discharge their seeds until the tree or the branch to which they belong dies. Consequently, when one of

the groves is destroyed by fire, the burning of the trees causes the scales of the cones to open, and the seed which they contain is scattered profusely upon the ground ; and on the bare blackened site of the old grove a young green plantation of similar pines springs forth. This curious adaptation explains the remarkable circumstance that all the trees of the grove are of the same age. In an equally remarkable way the fires in the Australian bush, which are so destructive to the forests of that country, are made the very means of reproducing the vegetation. One of the most common trees of these forests, the wattle, or native acacia, is specially adapted not only to survive these bush fires, but even to profit by them. Its seeds will not germinate until they are plunged in boiling water, or, if left to themselves, until they have been scorched by a forest fire. The burning of an old forest is therefore necessary to develop a new generation of fresher and more vigorous trees.

Another illustration of the principle may be derived from volcanic regions. No scenes of earth are lovelier than those which are subjected to the frequent destructive action of volcanoes. The Bay of Naples is confessedly one of those spots in which scenic beauty has culminated, in which are focused all the charms of landscape loveliness. Its beauty seems more a revelation of the inner soul of the universe than a mere reflection of transparent air and brilliant sunshine. And yet this second Eden is the creation of volcanic fires. No soil is so fertile as crumbling lava and volcanic ashes. The destroyer of the fields and gardens is thus

the renovator ; and out of each successive baptism of fire, the scene emerges with a richer luxuriance and a more passionate loveliness. The ashes of the burning that have devastated homestead and vineyard, reappear in the delicate clusters of the grape, and the vivid verdure of the vine leaves which embower a new home of happiness on the site.

And—a case of extremes meeting—frost has the same effect as fire. No meadows are greener, no corn-fields more luxuriant, than those which spread over the soil that has been formed by the attrition of ancient glaciers. The cedars of Lebanon grow on the moraines left behind by ice streams that had sculptured the mountains into their present shape ; and over the ranges of the Sierra Nevada, the coniferous forests, the noblest and most beautiful on earth, are spread in long curving bands, braided together into lace-like patterns of charming variety—an arrangement determined by the course of ancient glaciers, upon whose moraines all the forests of the Nevada are growing, and whose varied distribution over curves and ridges and high rolling plateaus, the trees have faithfully followed. Elsewhere throughout the world pine-woods usually grow, not on soil produced by the slow weathering of the atmosphere, but by the direct mechanical action of glaciers, which crushed and ground it from the solid rocks of mountain ranges, and in their slow recession at the end of the glacial period, left it spread out in beds available for tree-growth. Thus, from the ashes left behind by the slow grinding of the ice-ploughs of the earth's great

secular winter, has sprung up the wonderful beauty of the pine-forests, which welcome the winter's snow and the summer's sunshine, and maintain their youthful greenness unimpaired from century to century through a thousand storms.

Is there not beauty for ashes, when the starchy matter which gives the grey colour to the lichen is changed by the winter rains into chlorophyl, and the dry, lifeless, parchment-like substance becomes a bright green pliable rosette, as remarkable for the elegance of its form as for the vividness of its colour? Does not the corn of wheat, when God, as Ezekiel strikingly says, "calls" for it and increases it, develop out of the grey ashes that wrap round and preserve the embers of its life, the long spears of bright verdure which pierce through the dark wintry soil up to the sunshine and the blue air of heaven? Does not the ivy which, at the close of autumn, in spite of its eternal monotony of hue and freshness, sympathizes with the fading leaves around, and assumes, in harmony with them, colours varying from dark brown to brilliant scarlet and purple, produce out of the ashes of its summer growth which have caused these russet tints in the leaves, a new and even more striking beauty in the following spring? What are the materials that enter more or less into the composition of those parts of a plant in which the life is arrested for a time before it starts anew with increased vigour—the root, the stem, the fruit, the seed; what are starch, gum, sugar, and most of the products of vegetation, so useful in human economy, and so absolutely necessary

in the economy of plants, but just the ashes deposited by the flame of life as it burns away the structure, conserving the embers of that life for a fresh conflagration of beauty when the new impulse of growth is felt? Without these ashes there could be no resuscitation of vegetable life, when once it had burnt itself away. All the beauty of the green fields and woods thus springing from the root, or the seed, or the bud, is produced from the ashes of previous vegetation. On the lawn, the golden suns of the dandelion expire in the grey ashes of their downy seeds, which float away on the breeze to kindle into golden suns on other lawns. The very soil out of which vegetable life starts is made up of the ashes of former plants; and the tree that feeds upon the decay of its own fallen leaves displays the richest luxuriance of foliage. What is all the fair summer growth of this year but the beauty that has sprung out of the ashes of last summer's growth? The combustion that has produced those ashes in the intervening autumn and winter has taken place so quietly and gradually that we have not been conscious of it. And yet, in importance and magnitude, the grandest conflagration compared with it sinks into insignificance. And the power that has developed new beauty out of the ashes has also been working slowly and silently in the tiny laboratory of every green blade and leaf that unfolds itself to the mellow sunshine.

Some plants are found only where something has been burnt. Farmers say that wood ashes will cause the dormant white clover to spring up; and fields

treated in this manner will suddenly be transfigured with the fragrant bloom. A lovely little moss, whose seed-vessels, by the twisting and untwisting of their stems, indicate the changes of the weather like a barometer, grows on moors and in woods in spots where fires have been; and it covers with its bright green verdure the sites of buildings, marking with its soft delicate cushions where the hearthstone had been. From its fondness for growing in such places, it is known in France by the familiar name of *La Charbonnière*. In similar spots is found the common morel, a crisp white fungus, everywhere esteemed as a valuable and delightful article of food; its presence being an unfailing evidence of the former existence of fire in the place. It grows in the greatest profusion in the woods where charcoal has been made. Thus out of the eater in the most literal manner comes forth meat. After the great London fire, a species of mustard grew up on every side, covering with its yellow blossoms the charred ruins and the recently exposed soil strewn with ashes; and, as if to show some curious affinity between the conflagration of cities and the mustard tribe, after the more recent burning of Moscow, another species of the same family made its appearance among the ruins, and is still to be met with in the neighbourhood of that city. When an American forest is burnt down, a different class of trees usually spring up on the spot; and by this rotation of crops nature maintains the fertility of the soil, and brings beauty out of ashes.

Passing from the applications of the principle in the

sphere of nature to those which may be made in the human world, I may observe that out of the ashes of the burnt-offering all the beauty of the Hebrew faith emanated. These ashes of the victim on the altar were the evidence that the fire had done its utmost, and consequently that the offering had been fully completed and accepted, having ascended to God as an odour of a sweet savour. To consume the burnt sacrifice to ashes was equivalent to a full and perfect acceptance of the offering, as we find in the words of the Psalmist : “The Lord remember all thy offerings and accept”—or, as the margin correctly renders the original word, turn to ashes—“thy burnt sacrifice.” And upon this symbolical fact, as a foundation, rested the whole Hebrew ritual and polity. The beauty of the religious services of the Israelites, the peace of their homes and hearts, the prosperity of their nation, all depended upon the great truth which the ashes of the burnt-offering implied. Indicating, as they did, that the penalty incurred by sin had been fully met, and the means of a complete atonement provided, the Israelites could enjoy freely all the blessings of life under the smile of heaven. The Jewish priest, in a white linen dress—the garment of mourning and penitence—which he assumed for the purpose, carefully removed the ashes from the top of the altar, and laid them, in the first instance, on the ground beside it, on the east side. Here, where the first rays of the rising sun would touch and illumine them, they were allowed to remain for a while, as a further proof of the fact that the sacrifice

was complete—that all which the law of atonement had prescribed had been done, not hurriedly, but with the utmost deliberation. The priest then changed his garments of mourning and penitence, and put on others not connected with the sacrificial ritual, but expressive of triumph and joy ; and thus arrayed, carried forth the ashes—the record of atonement completed—without the camp into a clean place. As out of the ashes of the burnt-offering laid on the barren sand, under the dews of heaven, would spring forth rich verdure, marking out the places of the completed sacrifice, as little green oases, or fairy rings in the desert, so God would give to His repenting and believing people beauty for ashes ; and as the priest exchanged his garments of mourning for garments of joy, so God would give them garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

And how expressive was this type of the atoning death of the Son of God ! The victim in His case too was reduced to ashes. We see as clearly on the cross on which was stretched His lifeless body, that the work of atonement was finished, and that a complete satisfaction had been made to God for human sin, as the priest saw in the ashes on the altar how entirely the sacrifice had met with the Divine approval and acceptance. As the ashes were laid beside the altar for a while, so the body of Jesus remained upon the cross some time after death, exposed to the idle and mocking gaze of the multitude, but most precious in the sight of Him whose law He had magnified and made honourable by His obedience unto death. As the ashes, fur-

ther, were placed on the east side of the altar, because from that quarter the bright light of the morning sun arose—a natural symbolism common to nearly all religions, Christians, Mohammedans, and Pagans alike turning to the east in prayer, and laying their dead and building their sacred shrines in that direction—so the Sun of Righteousness rose from that point of the compass, and cast back the light of the glory of the resurrection upon all the incidents and circumstances of His death. The radiance of the rising sun shone on the ashes beside the Jewish altar, making it manifest that the lamb had been entirely consumed ; the sun rose upon the morning of the Sabbath after Christ's crucifixion upon a cross from which the slain Lamb of God had been taken away, and upon a sepulchre nigh at hand, wherein had lain the body of Him who was the end of the law for righteousness. And lastly, as the Jewish priests carried the ashes of the sacrifice without the camp into a clean place, so the body of Jesus was laid outside the city of Jerusalem in a new sepulchre wherein no man had ever before been laid. His grave was in a garden which was close to Golgotha, where He was crucified. Truly God gave beauty for ashes in that garden sepulchre ! How significant is the circumstance that the ashes of our great atoning sacrifice were laid in this clean place ! What a garden of loveliness and fruitfulness have they made of this desolate wilderness world ! All old things have passed away and all things have become new. A new creation, grander and fairer than the first, rose out of the

place of ashes, over which the morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy in a higher way than at the beginning. The brightest and sweetest things of earth now bloom around the sepulchre ; the place of a skull is embosomed in beauty, and the smile of heaven plays over its darkest and saddest aspect.

To the sinner who repents and believes in this great atoning sacrifice, God gives beauty for ashes. Sin is an infringement of God's law of order, through which alone all the brightness and variety of life can be evolved. It disintegrates, decomposes, reduces to ashes. Its great characteristic is its wearisome sameness and monotony, a dreary movement without variety from iniquity to iniquity. It is a defacement and destruction passing over the soul and life of man, like an earthquake over a city, overthrowing into one common heap of similar ruins all the fair variety of its architecture ; or like a fire through a forest, reducing all the multitudinous life and variety of vegetation to the same uniform dreary level of black cinders and grey ashes, on which no dew falls, and on which the sun itself shines with a ghastly and mocking smile. Out of this melancholy wreck the grace of God constructs the fresh and infinite variety of blessedness which belongs to the converted soul. The work of righteousness is the ever-varied unfolding of life, as compared with the silent motionless sameness of death —the growing of a plant in the desert from seed to foliage, and from foliage to blossom and fruit, with all

its new revelations of beauty and wonder, and all its varied influences upon nature and reactions of nature upon it, as compared with the shifting of the same barren sands from one place to another, or the blowing of the dead chaff to and fro, by the same weary wind of the wilderness. Not more remarkable was the contrast between the little green spots growing over the ashes of the sacrifices deposited outside the camp, that marked the resting-places of the tabernacle by the way—the places of death thus becoming the places of new and brighter life—than is the contrast between the garden of the renewed soul and the dreary wilderness of its former dead condition. And as the circles of greener and taller grass spread in the fairy ring over the sward, fed by the rich nitrogenous materials, resulting from the decay of the mushrooms that form them,—so from the mortification of the lusts and passions of the unrenewed nature will spring up and ripple over the heart and life a rich luxuriance of spiritual graces.

To the sorrowful, God gives beauty for ashes. Grievous to sensitive human hearts are sorrow and suffering ; but they play a gracious part in the moral economy of the world. They are the furnace in which our evil nature is reduced to ashes—the trial of our faith which is more precious than that of gold, even though it be tried by fire. We are laid with the great Sufferer of our race upon the altar and share the fellowship of His sufferings, and like Him are made perfect through suffering. “I believe,” says Heine, in one of his far-reaching sentences, “that by suffering animals

could be made human." It certainly refines the rudest nature ; its mystery lies at the root of all art and literature, of all the high life and progress of the world ; and when sanctified it elevates the humblest sinner into a companionship in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. Fairer than the moss that spreads its soft velvet pall over the cold ashes of the deserted hearth ; more precious than the delicate verdure of spring that covers over and obliterates the deaths and decays of autumn, is the moral beauty that comes out of the ashes of worldly loss and mortal pain and dark bereavement. On the most awful battlefields of life grow the greenest pastures of peace ; on the fierce lava streams that have desolated the heart, bloom the sweetest virtues and flourish the peaceable fruits of righteousness. As Nature spreads over her trap-rocks a bright garniture of lichen, moss, and wild-flower, making what had been the product of fiery convulsions that had shaken the whole earth to its foundations the most picturesque features in the landscape : so the Spirit of God lays His rich adornment of grace upon the greatest difficulties and the most disturbing trials, subduing them into harmony with heavenly things, and making the life in which they occur more attractive and useful. The pure white snow of the Divine peace falls upon that volcanic grief which lifts the soul highest to heaven ; and where the lurid flames of pain and passion vent forth their intolerable heat and their devastating fire-streams, the radiance of sunrises and sunsets, burning low, falls softly and innocently as the crimson stain on the snow

of the apple-blossom. And what a glory crowned the brow of the Redeemer when His suffering life was ended ; a glory different from and in some respects higher than that which belonged to Him in virtue of His essential Godhead ! The head that was covered with ashes, the life that was one embodied mourning and expiation for the sins of the world, is now anointed with the oil of gladness, and clothed with the garment of praise, girt about the paps with a golden girdle. And for all His suffering ones He has henceforth broken the connection of suffering with evil, as the work of an enemy who seeks only to waste and destroy, and associated it with heaven as the discipline of a loving Father, and the training of a nobler and more blessed life.

And lastly, there are the ashes of the dead ! These are the saddest of all. Even the ashes of the commonest household fire are melancholy things, for they remind us of what was once bright, and suggest thoughts of loss and ruin, with which our sad experience of life's changes enables us to sympathize. More melancholy still are the brown withered leaves of autumn, blown by the chill November winds about our path ; the ashes of Nature's gorgeous funeral pyre, in which the pomp and glory of the summer burnt itself out ; each of which tells us of a miracle of beauty and design, and a life of gladness which have perished for ever. We mourn the awful waste that goes on in the world, the extinction of species, the myriads of seeds that never germinate, of blossoms that fall in their perfection, and of fruits that never set or ripen.

But there is no waste in nature equal to the waste of human life. The ashes of the dead speak of the greatest humiliation, the uttermost loss, highest hopes extinguished, and noblest ideas perished. The gifts and gains of our civilization have made human life more precious than of old ; the results of science, showing through what long stages and by what wonderful processes it has reached its present perfection, have greatly exalted the conception of its importance ; the revelation of Divine grace has made known to us that, for its sake, the Son of God Himself died, and what unspeakable issues hang upon it ; and the experience of every heart that deeply loves, confirms the truth that in this human life love is by far the greatest and most blessed thing, “the most divine flower that Nature, in the long course of her evolutions, has evoked.” And here, in the ashes of the dead, it has all come to an end ; Nature has wasted all her gathered gains, thrown away her grandest thing just when it was perfected ! Other wastes may be repaired. Every spring, the earth rises in fresh loveliness from the baptism of the autumnal fire. It passes out through winter’s dark valley of the shadow of death into green pastures and beside still waters beyond. The leaves appear again in the old tenderness ; and out of the dry bulbs and withered-looking branches come the fair young flowers wearing the immortal bloom of Eden. But, what shall repair the waste of human death ? Can any following spring revive the ashes of the urn ? Spring lays its magic wand upon the green

mound of the churchyard, as Gehazi laid the prophet's staff upon the face of the dead child ; but, while the lower lives on the surface of the mound, that come there and show the sympathy of nature, rise out of their sleep at the touch—the grass roots sending forth their green blades, and the daisies opening their round eyes in wonderment—there is no response from the precious dust beneath. Ashes to ashes and dust to dust still maintain their physical connection.

To the pagan, all was hopeless ! The runners in the Promethean games of old set out in the contest bearing each a lighted torch ; and he gained the prize who first came to the goal with his torch still burning. But at the goal of death the torch of victor and vanquished alike was extinguished ; and no wiser or bolder spirit could carry it burning into the unexplored darkness beyond. On the tomb its image was carved, turned upside-down, never more to be lighted. Death was the eternal farewell ; and the handful of human ashes in the cinerary urn was only rescued for a little while from its ultimate fate of mingling with the indistinguishable elements of the universe. Even the Hebrew faith itself could scarcely imagine that any conscious beauty could ever come from such ashes ; and its helpless cry ascended up to the pitiless heaven, “Wilt thou show wonders to the dead ?” And, in our days, cruel science comes and employs all its strength in ruthlessly rolling a great stone to the mouth of the sepulchre. It tells us that nature has nothing to suggest regarding a resurrection, nothing indeed that can be used as the faintest

analogy of it. The fair blossom from the seed, the winged insect from the chrysalis—these common familiar illustrations are examples of rejuvenescence or development, and not of resurrection. These living things do not spring from previously dead and decomposed forms, but are simply the outcome of a latent life that has never for one moment been interrupted ; and before we can use such analogies as arguments in favour of the resurrection, we must be shown some germ of animal or vegetable life, ground into dust and scattered by the winds, and entering into the composition of other bodies, whose materials have, nevertheless, been gathered together anew, and its old life restored unimpaired. But, of such a process in nature there has never been a single instance. There has never been, in all the physical world, a single example of life raised from actual death; all its revivifying processes attach only to things that are alive and representative of life.

But the Christian religion assures us that for the ashes of our dead we shall yet have immortal beauty. The truth of the resurrection is the new fact upon which Christianity rests its claims ; which Christianity asserts to be itself a Gospel. It is undoubtedly true that we once woke from nothing to consciousness ; and Revelation asserts that this mystery and miracle will be repeated, and in a higher form, from the nothingness of the grave. This is a truth in beautiful accordance with all the natural instincts and longings of our souls. Our deepest heart affections are the helpers of our highest hopes, and the instinctive guarantee of a

life to come. Love builds the heavenly as well as the earthly home. Love creates its own immortality ; for love is love for evermore. He who made the union of hearts here more powerful than the attraction of star to star, more beautiful than the blossoming of flower to flower, more precious than the highest flights and attainments of intellect, must "grant the reunion, having made the union so sweet." He who has wakened in us such great capacities, who has unfolded to us such countless wonders of creation for our instruction and delight, and lighted up the universe with a glory and a beauty so divine, would not have done so if death were our extinction and the dust our end. He has sent His Son out of His own bosom, to say to the multitudes in all the Christian ages who have devoted themselves to His work and sacrificed their lives for His sake, with the deep conviction in their souls that the sufferings of this life were not worthy to be compared with the glory that should be revealed in them ; to the myriads who have laid their beloved dead to rest in the sure and certain hope of a happy reunion—"If it were not so, I would have told you." He has not told us ; and therefore all concerning the future life upon which He has caused our hearts to hope is true.

' It is not beauty *for* ashes that we want ; but beauty *from* ashes. The inmost longing of every human heart is not for an unknown and untried future happiness, but for a restoration, beautified and unalloyed, of what has already been. We do not care for substitutes

for what we have lost ; what we want is a resurrection of our dead loves, our past joys. We feel safer and surer with what we have already experienced. The faint blue smoke that ascends from the shepherd's lowly shieling on the mountain waste is more precious to the wanderer than the gorgeous sunset clouds that hang high above it in the western sky. And dearer far to the human heart is the old familiar earth, with its homely ways and common experiences, than all the gorgeous descriptions of heaven with its golden streets and jewelled walls. No imaginable or unimaginable beauty could possibly compensate us for the ashes of what we had previously loved.

The hope that is set before us in the gospel appeals to this universal human feeling. It is not altogether a new heaven and a new earth that are to arise from the conflagration and ashes of the old ; but a place prepared by Him who wears our nature and knows our experience, filled with objects long familiar to us, and furnished with delights which we have already enjoyed in part. It is no new creature, no strange being, forgetful of the past, soaring out of the power and memory of the beautiful affections of the earthly home to the ethereal fellowship with God and angels, that will be raised from the dust to dwell in that new earth, and under these new heavens, but the friend we loved here, whose mortal form and human love will put on immortality. The alchemists of old believed that in the embers of all things their primordial forms existed, and that therefore they could

create the rose with its green foliage and crimson blossoms complete from its own ashes, but without the bloom and fragrance—a delicate apparition like the ghostly downy head of the dandelion that springs up where the golden sun of the flower had set. But a more cunning Alchemist will restore from the ashes of our beloved dead the old human form in all its human perfection, the self-same being with whom on earth and in time we took sweet counsel, transfigured, glorified, but still unchanged in all essential elements ; the glorious influences of heaven only quickening within the heart the dear familiar memories of earth. In the highest and fullest sense shall beauty then be given for ashes ; and the revelation of a glory that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, shall be seen in the “little dust that here we over-weep.”

Very specially at the close of the year are we reminded of the substitution of beauty for ashes, in the history of the world, in the experience of man. The anniversary then comes round of the birth of Him who came into our world and into our nature for the very purpose of giving beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. He Himself proclaimed in the synagogue of Capernaum that this was the great object of His mission. He came into our nature to make us new creatures ; He came into our world to make all its old, sinful, miserable things new. He set agoing, by His life and death, a redemptive process, which has been going on ever since, developing more and more of

its power and grace, and producing greater and nobler results. And at that season we are specially invited to share in the blessings of His grace, and to rejoice in the triumph of His righteous cause over the evils of the world. Whether we are then sitting beside the cold ashes of some once bright glowing hope or dream of love ; whether we are bearing upon our head and heart the ashes of mourning for some beloved one, whose hand will never more clasp ours, whose face will never more smile in tenderness upon us ; whether we are looking back upon the ashes of a wasted life that in its burning has shed light upon no noble or useful work ; whatever may be the nature of the ashes beside which we stand at the close of the year, and feel how much meaning lies in the little mournful monosyllable, "gone," the holy child Jesus can give us beauty *for* them, beauty *from* them ; can give us back far more than we have lost, can restore in a higher form what is gone. From the ashes of our sins and the ashes of our sorrows, He can give us a beauty of hope and a beauty of holiness which will be a true gladness in our hearts. The narrowing and descent of our life into these ashes is, through repentance and faith, for the broadening and brightening of it into glimpses and foretastes of the larger and grander life beyond.

THE CHRISTMAS ROSE.

UNTO the cradle of the Wondrous Child,
Heaven brought its star, and man his gold and myrrh ;
But nature brings each year a living gift
To halo the Divine event ; a star
Of earth, that once came from the East, and sheds
Its silver radiance round our common homes.
It comes, like Him whose birth it celebrates,
To cheer the winter of the world, and make
The very snow to blossom into life.
When earth has reached its darkest hour, this gleam
Of coming dawn appears. We seem to see
The snowdrop's mystic presence on the lawn ;
The crocus kindle where its light went out ;
The copse grow dense with purple haze of buds ;
And willows deck their wands with silken plumes.
Long mute, the birds, whene'er they see this sign,
Take heart to twitter ; and the sunbeams pale
Grow warmer as they shine upon its flowers ;
And where it breathes its subtle fragrance round,
The very air seems conscious of the Spring.
Last child of the old year, first of the new—
Ghost of the past, soul of the future rose—
It links the seasons with its silver clasp,
And blends our memories and hopes in one.
In this pale herald of the flowery year
Are sketched the types of lily and of rose,
Which afterwards, from its fair side in death,

Are separated to make the seasons gay.
From roots of ebon darkness, through the mould,
Spring up the pure white blossoms, one by one ;
Like human heart whose roots are dark with woe,
And yet produce the brightest flowers of heaven.
Its seeming petals—green leaves glorified—
Are moonlike made, through the December gloom,
To light dim insects to their honeyed task,
And so fulfil the higher ends of life.
At first, they come up pale and blanched with cold,
But as the days grow long, a warmer hue,
Like that which deepens in the summer rose,
Or tips the daisy's frill, creeps over them ;
As if they blushed in a white flowerless world,
To find themselves the only blooming things.
Unchanged they last until the seed is ripe,
In which the single life dies for the race.
And then, their purpose served, they darken down
Into the dusky green of common leaves.
Transfiguration strange ! A lowly sign
Of Him whose robe and face shone whiter far
Than Hermon's crest, while of His death He talked !
That which exalts the flower above its wont,
Ennobles everything. The priestly dress
Of beauty and of glory clothes each life
That yields itself a sacrifice to love.

THE END.

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